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Ruby

Mary

Deia

Miss Langdon

John

William

Elizabeth

Alice

Robert

Thomas



She perches on an arm of a chair.

COMEDIES IN MINIATURE
BY
MARGARET CAMERON



Frontispiece by Harrison Fisher

McCLURE, PHILLIPS & CO.
NEW YORK
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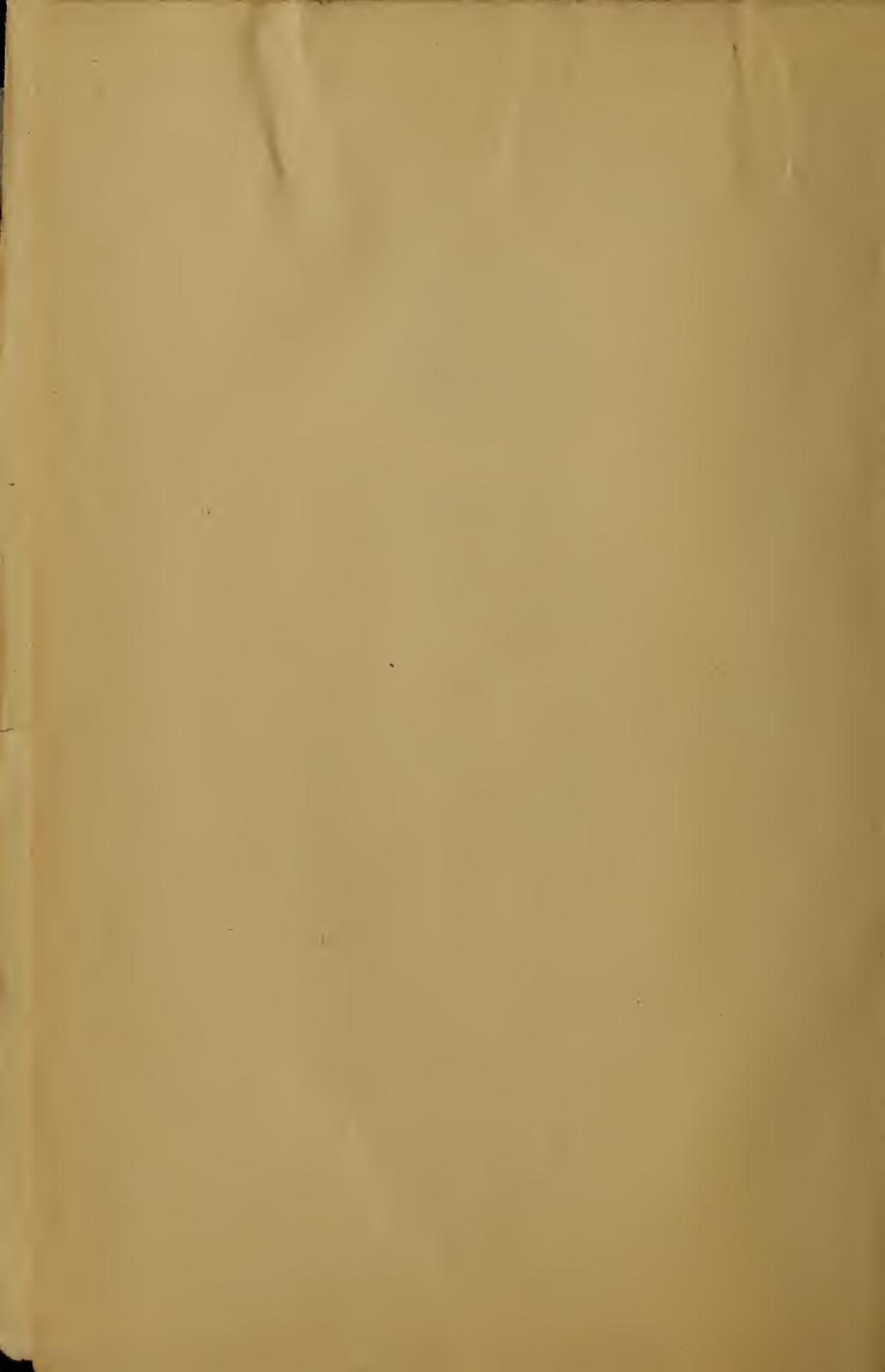
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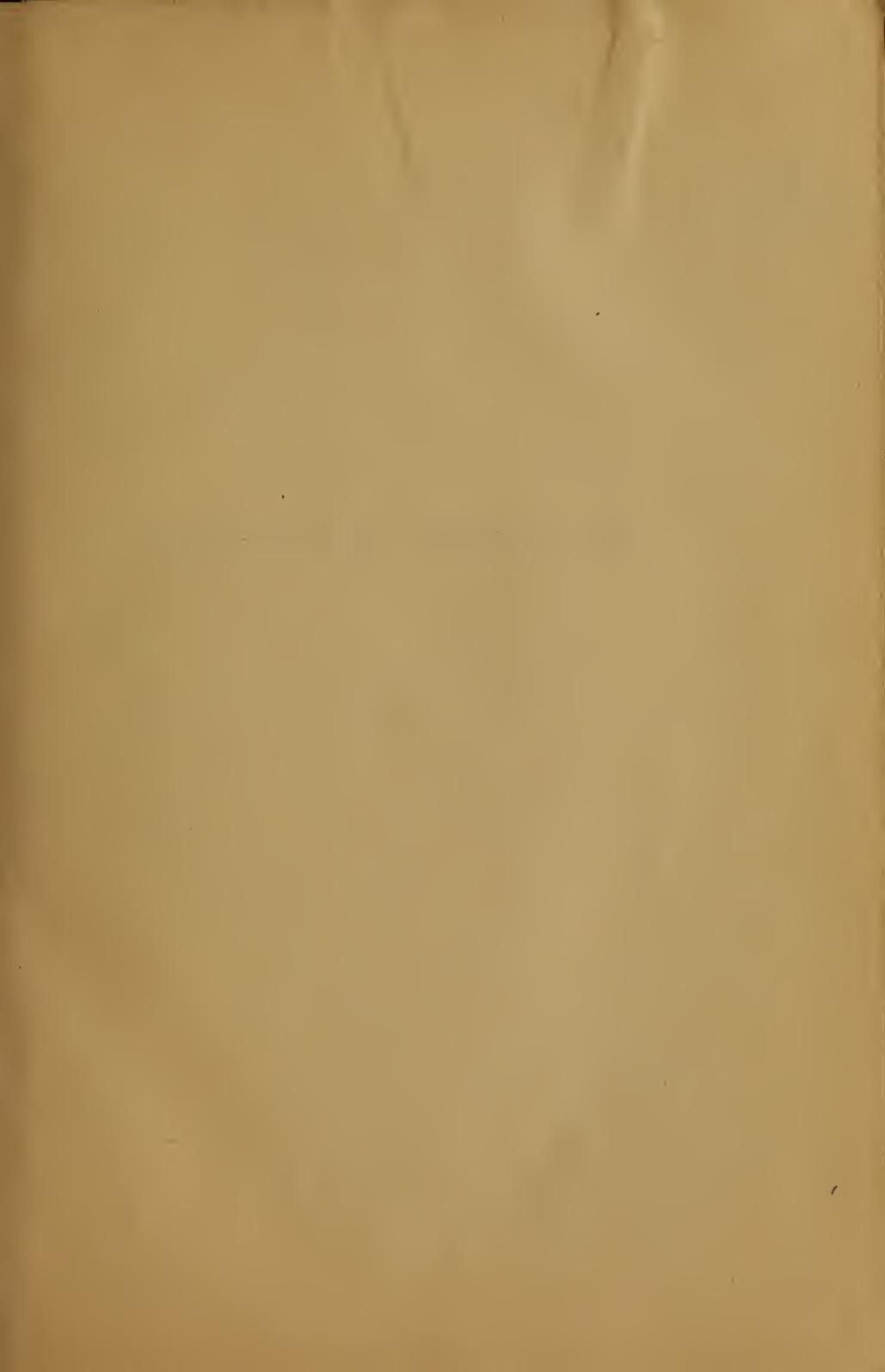
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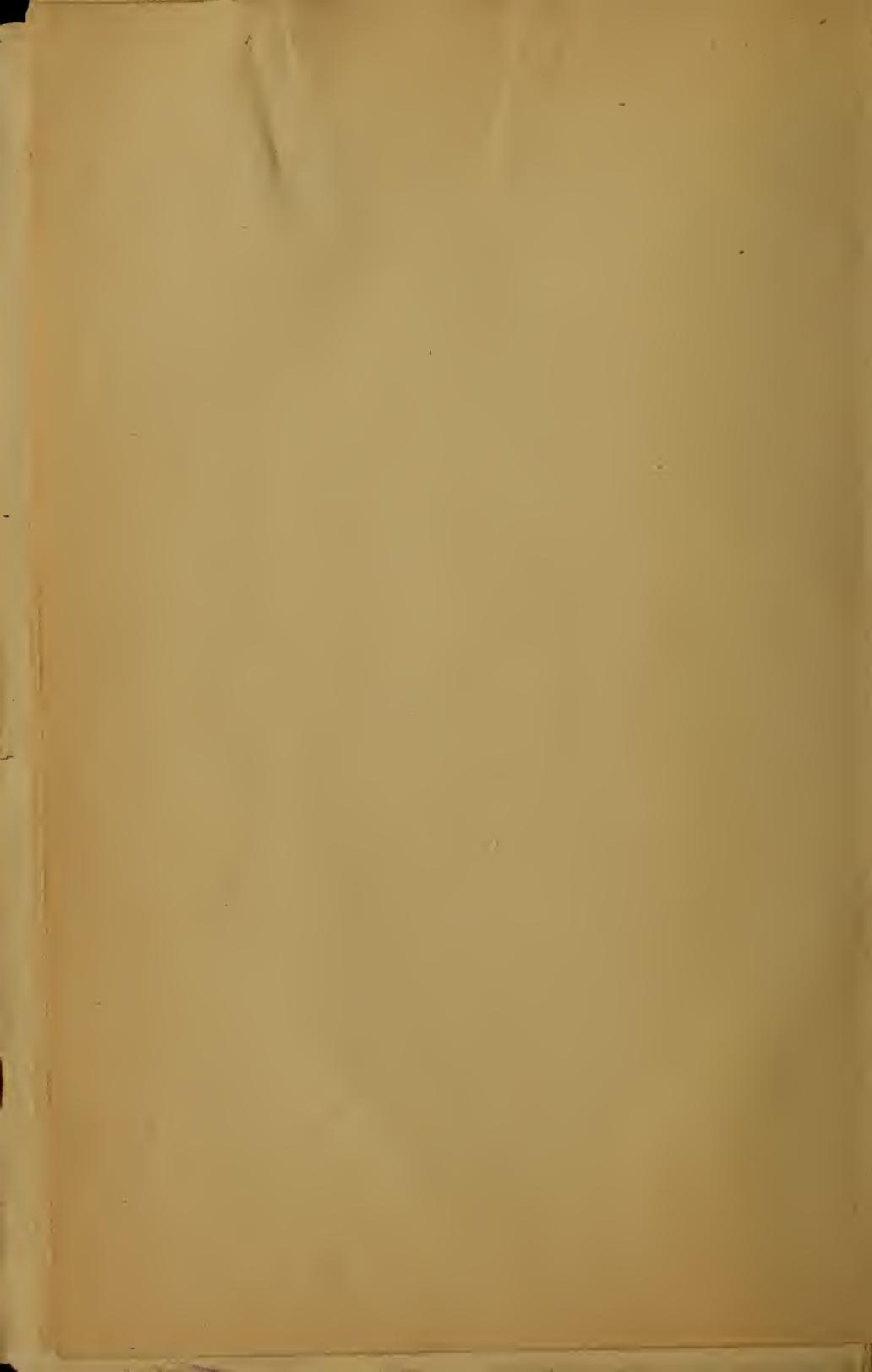
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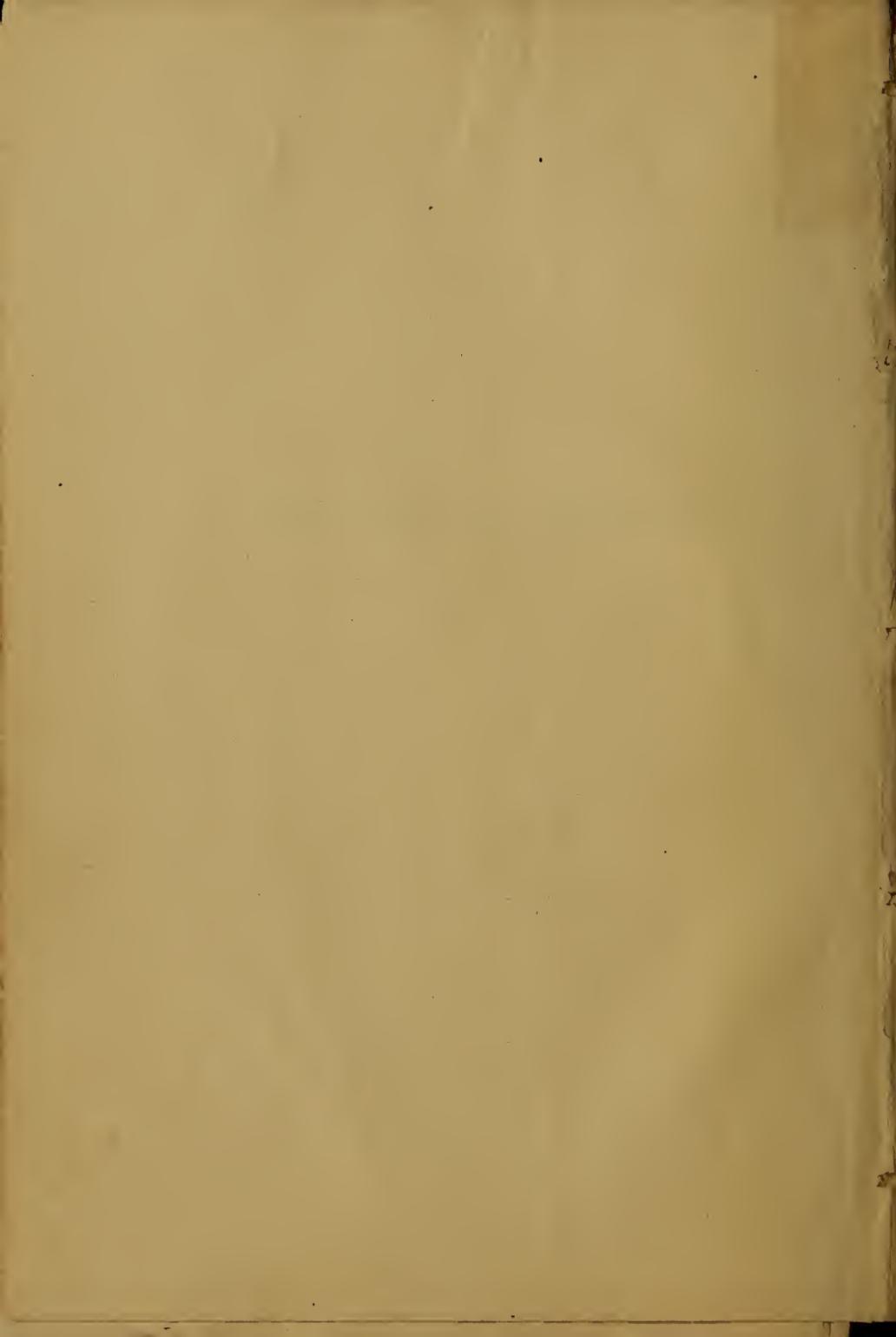




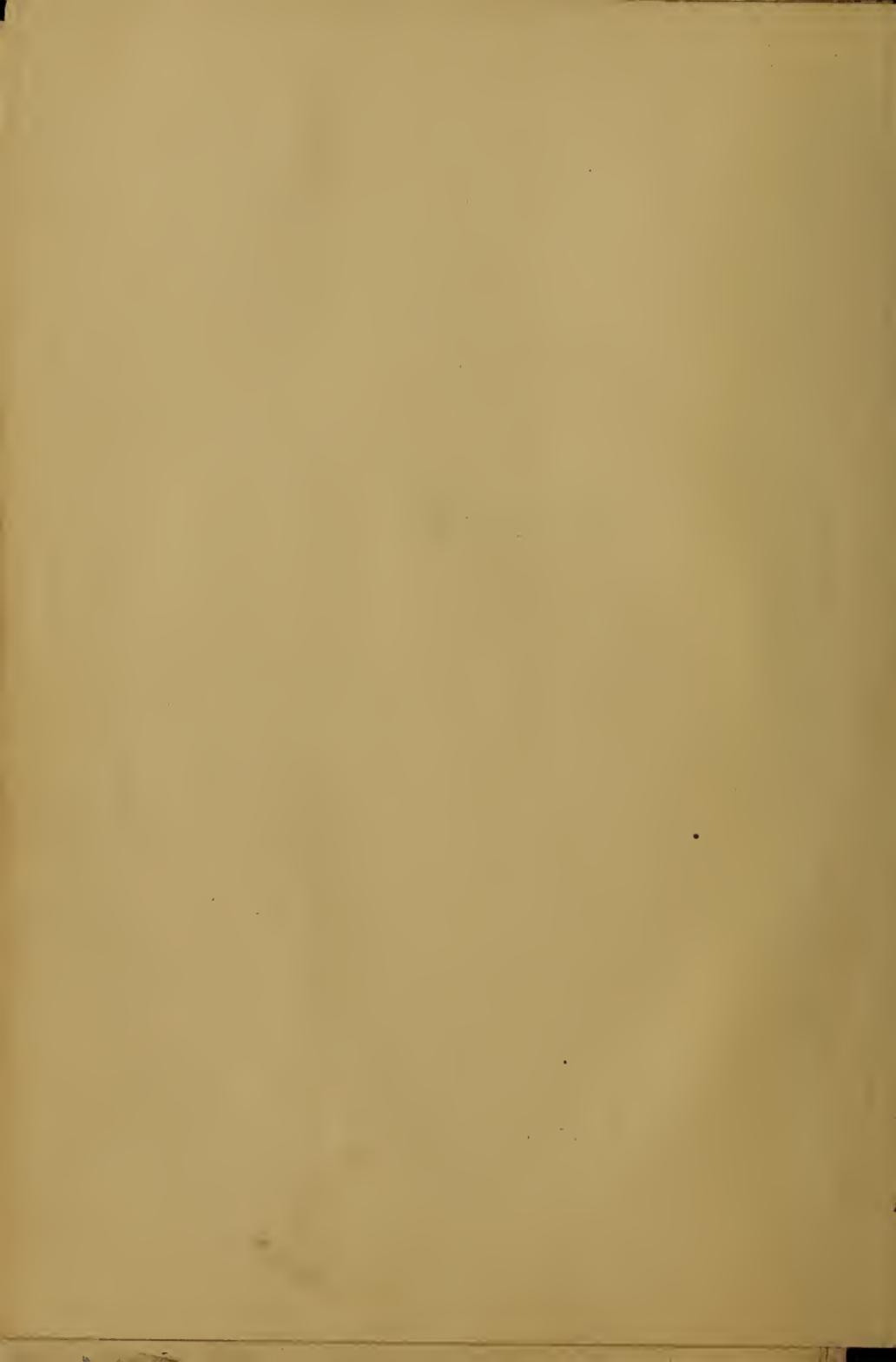
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1895

COMEDIES IN MINIATURE



To My Mother



PUBLISHERS' NOTE

In presenting these plays and monologues to the public, the publishers have in mind not only their interest as literature for the general reader, but their special value for those interested in amateur dramaticals as well. All of the pieces here printed were written expressly to be acted, and have been performed with great success by amateur actors in various parts of the country; two of them have even had the distinction and guarantee of a performance by the students of Mr. Franklin H. Sargent's school, the American Academy of Dramatic Arts. Of Mrs. Cameron's work Mr. Sargent has expressed himself as follows:

"Theatrically and dramatically I can say that I believe her plays are most unusual and valuable. In the midst of the great dearth and second-rate results, which are so common in the playwriting field, the plays of Mrs. Cameron seem, to myself and my associates of the Academy, to be exceptionally brilliant, dramatically effective, and theatrically valuable. I have never read a modern

PUBLISHERS' NOTE

writer who had such a fine and complete insight of feminine characterisation and whose delineation of female character was more accurate and interesting. The dialogue alone is so full of human spirit and brilliancy of thought and feeling that I am sure the enthusiastic readers of her plays when published will be many. Mrs. Cameron is doing better work to-day and shows more promise than any other woman playwright within my immediate knowledge."

There are few enough plays at the present day suitable for representation on the amateur stage, it would seem, to make such a collection as this of Mrs. Cameron's of considerable importance to those who, having exhausted the few old favourites, are at a loss for fresh material.

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MISS DOULTON'S ORCHIDS

MISS DOULTON'S ORCHIDS

A Comedy in Two Parts

CHARACTERS

Cecily Belknap.

Bess Maynard.

Polly Winslow.

Owen Belknap.

Gordon McAllister.

Kenneth Moore, Belknap's cousin.

PART I

Morning

The leaded casements in the living-room of the Belknaps' suburban house stand open to admit the warm morning air, giving glimpses of trees and a garden beyond. A door on the right, leading to a veranda, is also open. Other doors at the back and on the left lead respectively to the hall and the library. The room is charmingly furnished, flowers, books, magazines, and a multitude of cushions giving evidence of constant and familiar occupancy.

CECILY BELKNAP, a smiling, vivacious, gracious young matron of twenty-five, is discovered in confidential chat with BESS MAYNARD, a spinster of thirty, whose mildly cynical point of view is indicated by a slightly satirical smile and contradicted by the quick sympathy of her glance. Both wear cotton morning gowns.

CECILY (*continuing conversation*).

And Polly declares she's going home next week. I hope she hasn't quarrelled with Ken, but I can't

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think of anything else that should send her off in this sudden fashion.

BESS.

I thought she was going to stay another month.

CECILY.

So did I, until this morning. I'm sure that was her intention when she came, and I can't think of anything that can have happened except, as I say, she may have quarrelled with Ken.

BESS (*glancing out the window*).

Well, if she has there are symptoms of a reconciliation, for she has just appeared in the garden and he is racing down the walk to overtake her.

CECILY (*springing up to look out*).

Really? Oh, good! I do wish those two would make a match!

BESS.

I wonder what there is in the early stages of matrimony that infects all women with the match-making microbe? Nobody seems to escape.

CECILY.

It's because we want to see all our friends as happy

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as we are. Bess (*wistfully*), aren't you ever going to marry?

BESS (*cheerfully*).

Well, not until I'm asked, anyway.

CECILY.

Oh, nonsense! You've refused nearly every man you know! I asked Gordon McAllister why he hadn't proposed to you——

BESS.

Cecily!

CECILY (*lightly*).

Oh, you know Gordon proposes to everybody! He said that no man voluntarily bored a woman with repetitions, and that it was understood that all known forms of proposal had been exhausted upon you without effect.

BESS (*with dignity*).

Really, Cecily, you must not——

CECILY (*airily*).

Now, don't mount your prancing steed in that fashion! At home it was perfectly understood that Gordon should propose to all the girls every summer. It was part of the programme for the season

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—and, I must say, he does it well! We used to wonder, sometimes, what he'd do if one of us should accept him. I threatened to do it once, just for fun, but Owen came that summer, and I forgot it.

BESS (*drily*).

Then Mr. McAllister is a sort of sentimental reservoir, is he? Always on tap?

CECILY.

Exactly! Come to think of it, Bess, I believe you're the only unmarried woman he has ever known to whom he hasn't proposed. I wonder if it means anything?

BESS (*with a short laugh*).

Cecily, you are incorrigible! Oh, here comes Polly.

Enter from the veranda POLLY WINSLOW, an impulsive, tender-eyed, radiant girl of twenty-two, carrying a handful of letters. She is followed almost immediately by OWEN BELKNAP, a tall, vigorous, well-knit man of thirty, whose happy habit takes him at once to his wife's side; and GORDON McALLISTER, a bachelor of thirty-eight, shrewd, genial, kindly; a squire of dames whom many seasons of social flattery

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have not sufficed to spoil, and whose popularity is even greater among men than among women. The men carry the morning papers.

POLLY.

The boy has just brought the mail. Here are two for you, Cecily, and three for me, and one for—Mr. Moore.

CECILY (*at window, calling*).

Ken! Oh, Ken! Here's a letter for you.

POLLY.

Mine are from home. One from mamma and one from—— (KENNETH MOORE, *an impulsive, good-natured, quick, boyish fellow of twenty-four, appears in the doorway leading to the veranda.*)

KENNETH.

A letter for me? Who from?

CECILY.

How should we know? (KENNETH *takes the letter and opens it, with a murmured apology. CECILY sighs as she reads her mail.*) Oh, me! Another Hearts party! That makes three next week!

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BESS.

That's because you're so deplorably good-natured, Cecily. Nobody invites me to Hearts parties.

GORDON.

Since your life is a perpetual game of Hearts, Miss Maynard, they probably hesitate to match their inexperience against your skill.

KENNETH.

I say! This letter's from Fred Grover. He says——

POLLY (*looking up from her letters*).

Fred Grover? Isn't he the man who's in love with Marie Doulton?

BESS

(*mischievously glancing at OWEN and KENNETH, who frown uneasily*).

The man? Has anybody arrived at the distinction of being *the man*? Did ever any man know Marie Doulton without falling in love with her?

OWEN

(*aside to BESS, as he makes opportunity to pass near her*).

Oh, what's the use of raking up old skeletons?

MISS DOULTON'S ORCHIDS

CECILY.

Why, you knew her, didn't you, Owen, before she went on the stage?

OWEN.

Yes. Yes, of course; I knew her. (*BESS conceals a smile.*)

CECILY.

There, Bess! There's one man.

BESS.

Oh, well—she wasn't an actress then. That makes all the difference in the world, you know. (*OWEN and KENNETH throw her relieved glances.*)

KENNETH

(*aside to BESS, leaning over her chair as he goes to join POLLY.*)

You're a good fellow, Bess, if you are a tease!

POLLY (*half absorbed in her mail.*)

They say Fred Grover has completely lost his heart.

KENNETH.

And his head as well, if I'm any judge. He says she's coming here——

BESS.

Why, is she? I didn't know that.

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KENNETH.

Yes, she opens in town to-night, and Fred says——

POLLY.

Is she as beautiful as people say? I've never seen her.

BESS.

She's the most beautiful woman I ever saw—and the most fascinating.

GORDON.

You know her? You're fond of her?

BESS.

I went to school with her.

GORDON (*with enthusiasm*).

Let's all go to see her!

OWEN (*laughing*).

"The ruling passion"! It's no use, Gordon! She's adamant. Wealth, position, titles, love, separately and in combination, have all failed to tempt her from the stage.

GORDON.

I suppose one may look at her? Can she act?

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KENNETH.

Can she act! Good heavens, man, where have you lived? She had New York literally at her feet last season.

GORDON.

That's no criterion. New York is essentially masculine, and its judgment of a woman is not to be trusted—especially if she be good to look at. I ask you, can she *act*?

OWEN.

She can! All together, now! (*Waves his arms.*)

OWEN, KENNETH, CECILY, BESS

(*in unison, laughing*).

She can!

OWEN.

Now, are you satisfied?

GORDON.

Entirely. When shall we go to see her? I'll get a box.

CECILY.

To-morrow night?

GORDON.

To-morrow night. I'll 'phone for seats at once.

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CECILY.

Don't get a stage-box, Gordon. One never sees anything but the audience, and the prompter in the flies.

GORDON.

You come and conduct the negotiations, then.

CECILY.

Very well. Come on, girls, we'll all go and superintend Gordon's order.

(BESS, CECILY, POLLY, and GORDON troop out to the hall, laughing and chatting as they go.)

KENNETH.

Say, Owen, haven't you ever told Cecily about your affair with Marie?

OWEN.

Well—er—no. You see, it wouldn't do any particular good, and it might worry her, so——

KENNETH (*thoughtfully*).

H'm. Yes, I suppose so. Well (*laughing*) Fred seems to be going the usual pace. He wants me to——

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Enter CECILY from the hall with a telegram, which she hands to OWEN.

CECILY.

Here's a message for you, Owen, marked "rush."

OWEN.

Wonder what's up now? (*He reads the telegram.*) Oh, it's from that fellow up at Centerville. He's in hot water again. You'll have to go up immediately, Ken. (*CECILY goes out.*)

KENNETH.

Confound him! He's more trouble than he's worth. I wish you'd take that business away from him, Owen.

OWEN (*looking at his watch*).

If you hurry you'll get the nine-thirty.

KENNETH.

All right. I wanted to take Polly to the links today, too!

OWEN.

Well, run along! You've only twelve minutes to catch that train.

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KENNETH.

All right. (*He stops in the doorway.*) Oh, by Jove, I forgot! Owen, you'll be in town to-day, won't you? Run into Bauer's and order the finest bunch of roses you can find—five dozen of the most expensive—and send them, with this card—(*feels in his pockets*) what the deuce did I do with the thing? Oh, here it is!

OWEN.

To Polly?

KENNETH.

No; to Marie Doulton. There's the address (*scribbling on the envelope in which the card is enclosed*). Don't forget, on your life, or you'll get me into no end of a scrape! (*Tosses envelope to OWEN and hurries to the door.*)

OWEN.

But I say, Ken! Hold on! You don't mean——

KENNETH (*watch in hand*).

Yes, I do! Never mind the price. Get them, sure! Good-bye. (*Runs off.*)

OWEN (*in doorway*).

But, Ken, hold on!

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KENNETH (*outside*).

That's all right. I'll miss that train! (OWEN *turns the envelope over in his hands, shaking his head dubiously.*)

Enter CECILY, POLLY, and BESS *from the library.*

CECILY.

Gordon's waiting for you to go to the links, Owen.

OWEN (*shortly*).

Can't. I'm going to town.

CECILY.

To town? I thought you and Ken were going to stay over all day to-day.

OWEN.

We were, but Ken's been called to Centerville, and I've got to go to town to attend to—some business. (*He looks distastefully at the envelope in his hand.*)

CECILY.

Well, go and tell Gordon, then. He's waiting. (OWEN *goes out.*)

(CECILY, POLLY and BESS *dispose themselves comfortably in easy-chairs.*)

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CECILY (*to Polly*).

Well, why you insist, all at once, upon going home, I don't see!

BESS.

Nor I. Isn't your bed good?

CECILY.

Isn't the weather perfect?

BESS.

Aren't we agreeable?

CECILY.

And the men attentive? Ken's your shadow, and I'm sure, Owen fairly dotes upon you!

POLLY.

You don't seem to object.

CECILY.

Well, mercifully, I'm not jealous—of my friends.

POLLY (*curiously*).

Are you jealous of anybody?

CECILY.

No. That is—why, no, of course not! Jealousy

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and vulgarity are synonymous terms. I trust neither applies to me.

POLLY.

I'm so glad you feel that way, dear! It's so—*common*—to be jealous! Besides, I can't imagine a girl marrying a man unless she could trust him absolutely, in the face of everything, can you?

BESS (*in laughing accusation*).

Polly, you're in love!

POLLY (*much confused*).

Why, Bess, what nonsense!

CECILY (*complacently*).

Well, of course, I never cared for anybody but Owen——

BESS (*groaning*).

“The only man I ever loved!”

CECILY (*indignantly*).

Well, he is! And nothing could ever make me the least little speck jealous of Owen. He honestly believes that I'm the only perfect woman in the world. You know, girls, it sometimes frightens me to think

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what might happen if he should discover, some day, that I'm only an ordinary sort of woman, after all.

POLLY (*gravely nodding*).

I know. One wonders how long one can live up to it.

BESS (*mischievously*).

You know, *I* wonder if it isn't better not to marry at all, than to live in constant dread of falling off one's pedestal.

CECILY.

Oh, my, no!

POLLY.

Oh, no, Bess!

CECILY.

It deprives one of so much, not to marry.

POLLY (*impulsively*).

Girls—— (*She stops as suddenly as she began.*)

CECILY.

Well?

POLLY.

Oh, nothing.

BESS.

Go on, Polly. It ruins the nerves to be excited that way, and then held in suspense.

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POLLY.

No, I—it's nothing. I thought I'd say something—but I changed my mind.

CECILY.

I hope you were going to say that you've decided not to go home. Polly, why don't you stay?

POLLY.

Oh, I can't! There's so much to do!

BESS.

To do! What on earth have you to do? If ever there was a lily of the field, it's Polly Winslow!

POLLY.

Oh, there's sewing, you know, and——

CECILY.

Sewing! *You?*

BESS.

My prophetic soul! I knew it!

POLLY (*half defiantly*).

What?

BESS.

It's a trousseau! You've been going and getting engaged!

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CECILY.

Polly! Have you?

POLLY.

Y-y-yes, but—— (CECILY *embraces her rapturously*; BESS *more calmly*.)

CECILY.

When, Polly? When?

POLLY.

Last night—in the garden. But how did you know, Bess?

BESS (*mysteriously*).

I have missed my vocation. I should have been a detective—or a clairvoyant. The past explained and the future revealed from a single hair of your head!

POLLY.

Yes, but Bess——!

BESS.

There are no secrets I cannot penetrate, no mysteries I cannot solve! In addition to keen perceptive faculties and unfailing deductive ability, I am the possessor of occult powers of a high order!

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POLLY.

No, but really, how did you know? We thought we had been so careful!

BESS (*suddenly matter-of-fact*).

When a young person of your tastes, disposition, and general friskiness begins suddenly to talk down to her elders on the subjects of connubial confidence, the ideals of marriage, a life of unselfish surrender and kindred topics, it is safe to assume, without further evidence, that she is bending her neck to the yoke. And when, in addition to that, a crabbed and middle-aged spinster happens to be sitting quietly in the dark end of the veranda when the contracting parties are approaching the critical moment, and sees——

POLLY (*breathlessly*).

Bess, you weren't! You didn't!

BESS.

Well, at any rate, I didn't talk about it. I couldn't escape, but I shut my eyes and put my fingers in my ears.

POLLY.

Did you, Bess? Did you, really?

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BESS.

Indeed, I did! I should hate to feel myself an accessory before the fact! So I stopped my ears, shut my eyes, and held my tongue.

POLLY (*embracing her*).

Oh, you dear! (*As an afterthought.*) Oh, Bess! You were alone, weren't you? Mr. McAllister wasn't with you?

BESS (*turning away*).

Wasn't I silent? You didn't hear any conversation, did you?

POLLY.

Oh, of course, if he'd been there, you'd have been talking! Besides, you're not the sort of girl to sit in dark corners with men, anyway.

CECILY (*laughing*).

No, for when she does, they always propose to her. She's grown wary.

BESS (*annoyed*).

Don't be silly, Cecily!

Enter OWEN.

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CECILY.

Oh, Owen, what do you think? Polly and Ken are engaged!

OWEN.

What? Good! By Jove, that's— (*Looks suddenly blank.*) By Jove!

CECILY, BESS, POLLY.

What's the matter?

OWEN (*troubled*).

Oh—er—nothing. I just happened to remember something. (*Furtively takes card envelope from his pocket and glances at it.*)

CECILY.

Well?

OWEN.

Oh, never mind now.

CECILY (*impatiently*).

Well, why don't you say you're glad?

OWEN.

Eh?

CECILY (*laughing*).

About Polly and Ken, stupid!

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OWEN.

Oh, yes, of course, I—I'm delighted, you know.

POLLY (*pouting*).

Well, you don't look it!

OWEN (*making an effort to smile*).

Oh, yes, I do. I—I don't feel just right this morning. I want to see you a moment, Cecily.

CECILY.

Are you ill, dear?

OWEN.

Oh, no, I'm all right, but— When did this happen, Polly?

POLLY (*wonderingly*).

Last night.

OWEN.

Last night! Oh, yes; I just wondered. Ready, Cecily? (OWEN and CECILY go out.)

POLLY.

Well, what has happened to him? Last week he told me that if I refused Ken, he'd never forgive me—and now look at him!

BESS (*lightly*).

My dear, apparently you have yet to learn that the

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surest way to earn a man's disapproval is to give him what he wants.

POLLY (*laughing*).

You miserable old cynic! Here comes Mr. McAlister. *I'm* going to write letters.

BESS (*hurriedly*).

Oh, no, Polly, don't! Stay here with me!

POLLY.

Not I! I believe that man's in love with you, and I'm no fifth wheel! (*She runs into library, laughing.*)

Enter GORDON from veranda.

GORDON (*looking after Polly*).

Have our young friends confessed? Or are they still lingering over the taste of stolen waters?

BESS (*prosaically*).

They've announced their engagement, if that's what you mean.

GORDON (*sighing with exaggerated relief*).

A-ah! I'm glad to hear it! I felt like an accomplice.

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BESS.

They have no idea that you were there, and, of course (*anxiously*), you'll not mention it?

GORDON.

I'm obedient—but it is a temptation! (*Coaxingly.*) Just a suggestion, you know.

BESS (*indignantly*).

You didn't listen!

GORDON.

After you had commanded me to stop my ears? Certainly not!

BESS (*cynically*).

If one were uncharitable, one might infer that it's just as well that I was there to insist upon the observance of the—decencies.

GORDON (*reflectively*).

Well, it's always interesting to know how another man does that sort of thing, you know.

BESS.

Yes, if one prides one's self upon the variety of methods at one's disposal.

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GORDON (*whimsically*).

I have often reflected upon the mistake in the order of things. Now, why should a woman, who never needs to take the initiative in matters of that sort, have the sole opportunity of hearing and judging of a variety of proposals of marriage? She gains a lot of knowledge and experience that she can never use, while a man, awkward at best, never hears any proposals but those he makes himself. He, therefore, is forced to depend upon his own inadequate tact and limited understanding of the possibilities of the subject, at a moment when he needs all the wisdom of the sages, the perception of the seers, and the charm of the sirens to aid him!

BESS.

Which explains in part, I suppose, the fact that some men are widely known as having proposed to every woman who would listen to them?

GORDON.

Miss Maynard, would you—I mean, do you—that is, is a woman going to be hard on a fellow just because he's amused a few girls and done his best to live up to their expectations?

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BESS.

Mr. McAllister!

GORDON.

Yes, I know, but—now, I'm in dead earnest! You know there are girls who—well, who like to amuse themselves and be amused. You're not one of them—you never were one of them (BESS *conceals a smile*), but—is it going against a man that he's done his best to furnish amusement for them?

BESS (*with mock gravity*).

Is the subject one that impresses you as suitable material for—amusement?

GORDON.

No—no, of course, not to a woman of your sort! But you see, Miss Maynard, there are so blessed few women like you! I never knew another! I—I wish you'd answer me? Would you be hard on a fellow under those circumstances?

BESS.

I hope I should never be hard, as you call it, on any one, Mr. McAllister, but I should hesitate a long time before I considered seriously anything that might be said to me by a man who had formed the proposal *habit*. There's Polly on the veranda.

MISS DOULTON'S ORCHIDS

Shall we join her? (*She goes quickly off. GORDON looks after her, groans, despondently shakes his head, and follows slowly.*)

CECILY and OWEN enter from the library, both looking troubled. She carries the card envelope.

CECILY.

And he made no explanation at all?

OWEN.

None whatever. It doesn't seem to me there's much to be said, is there? The fact remains that he made a blooming young idiot of himself over Marie Doulton for two solid years, and beggared himself sending her flowers and fruit and candy—the only reason it wasn't diamonds and rubies was that she wouldn't accept them—and now that she's come back, within twenty-four hours of her arrival he begins it again, although he's just become engaged to one of the most charming girls on earth. There isn't much to be said in explanation of that, is there?

CECILY (*miserably*).

No, I suppose not. But, oh, poor Polly! Poor little Polly! You'll send them, Owen?

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OWEN (*grimly*).

Oh, yes, I'll send them!

CECILY.

I wonder— Did he write on the card?

OWEN.

I don't know.

CECILY.

I suppose it wouldn't do to look?

OWEN.

Cecily!

CECILY (*hurriedly*).

Oh, no, I wouldn't *do* it, dear! Only (*tearfully*)
I'm thinking about Polly! Poor, poor little Polly!
And she's going home to make her trousseau!

OWEN.

Well, don't say anything about this to any one, for
the present, Cecily. We'll give Ken a chance to
say whatever he has to say before we mention it.
Young rascal! I'd like to thump him! (*Looks at
his watch.*) Good-bye.

CECILY (*going to the hall with him*).

Good-bye, dear. (*She disappears in the hall for a
moment, and re-enters at once.*)

MISS DOULTON'S ORCHIDS

GORDON *enters from the veranda.*

GORDON (*dejectedly*).

Hello, Cecily. Say, Cecily, you've always been a good friend of mine. Why didn't you tell me years ago that I was making a donkey of myself, and shut me off?

CECILY (*puzzled*).

Eh?

GORDON.

Why did you let me go on making love to every pretty little idiot I met? Didn't I deserve better at your hands than that? What did I ever do to you?

CECILY (*demurely*).

Well, you proposed to me three times.

GORDON.

I know; just so you'd know when not to believe a fellow. You knew I didn't mean it, and I knew you knew it; and maybe I saved you a heartache some time. Maybe you'd have believed some other fool if I hadn't trained you, instead of keeping your heart all sweet and sound for Owen.

CECILY.

Well, then, maybe that's the reason I didn't "shut

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you off," as you say. Perhaps you've been a public benefactor all these years, Gordon.

GORDON.

Hang the public! What do I care about the public? When I finally meet a woman whom—whom I do—well, whom I do love! There!—and want to marry her, she's heard all these stories of my idiotic past, and imagines my heart's a worm-eaten old nut, not even worth the cracking!

CECILY.

Merciful powers! Is it Bess?

GORDON (*savagely*).

Is it Bess? Of course it's Bess! (*Cecily laughs.*) Who else could it be? And I don't see anything to laugh at, either! I tell you, Cecily, I'm in dead earnest about this!

CECILY (*laughing*).

Oh, Gordon, to think of it! After all these years!

GORDON.

I suppose you thought I was going on making a buffoon of myself for ever, did you? I suppose you thought I hadn't any heart, did you? I suppose you thought—oh, thunder! What do I care

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what you thought! I want to know what I'm going to do!

CECILY (*wiping tears of laughter from her eyes*).

Have you proposed to her?

GORDON (*sulkily*).

No.

CECILY (*wonderingly*).

Well, why don't you?

GORDON.

Don't know how. Don't know what to say.
(*CECILY shrieks with laughter.*) Well, I don't!

CECILY.

And you have been celebrated, ever since I can remember, as making the most artistic proposals of any man in the whole country-side!

GORDON.

I know that. But I want to make one now that somebody'll believe. You never believed 'em. Nobody ever believed 'em. Besides, I don't want to make an "artistic proposal"! She'd laugh at me and tell me I had acquired the "proposal habit"!

COMEDIES IN MINIATURE

CECILY.

Well, so you have.

GORDON.

I deny it! If I had, I'd know what to say to her. Say, Cecily, what did Owen say to you?

CECILY (*trying somewhat unsuccessfully to subdue her laughter*).

He said—let me see! Why, I don't remember. I don't think he said much of anything. I guess it was more what he did.

GORDON.

Well, what did he do?

CECILY.

Gordon!

GORDON.

I know; but I've helped you out of many a tight place, Cecily—and you were never as badly caught as I am. If you love me, if you love—her, if you love Owen, or—or *anybody*, give me a lift!

CECILY (*trying to speak gravely*).

Well, I will, Gordon. Truly, I will; but not now. I've got something else to do now. But I'll think about it.

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GORDON.

Well, hurry up! And say, Cecily—don't tell Owen! (CECILY *laughs again*.) I know (*ruefully*); I suppose it *is* funny. But wait a bit, won't you?

CECILY.

Yes, I promise. I won't tell. Oh (*suddenly grave*), here come Polly and Bess now.

Enter BESS, in street dress, followed by POLLY.

BESS.

I'm off for town, Cecily. Can I do anything for you?

CECILY.

I didn't know you were going.

BESS.

I'm going to see Marie Doulton.

CECILY (*coldly*).

Oh!

POLLY.

Tell her we're all coming to see her play to-morrow night.

BESS.

Yes, I will. Good-bye. (*Exit BESS.* GORDON

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looks after her for a moment, and then, with dogged deliberation, follows her.)

POLLY.

Oh, I can hardly wait to see her! You never saw her, did you?

CECILY.

No, and I don't want to.

POLLY.

Why not?

CECILY.

Oh—because.

POLLY (*lightly*).

Woman's reason. Because what?

CECILY.

I don't like her.

POLLY (*laughing*).

Cecily, I believe you *are* jealous!

CECILY.

Jealous! Of what?

POLLY.

Because Owen was in love with her once.

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CECILY.

Owen in love with her!

POLLY.

Why, yes! Mercy! Didn't you know it? Bess told me.

CECILY.

Bess told you that Owen was in love with Marie Doulton?

POLLY.

Oh, I'm sorry I told, if you didn't know it, Cecily! I thought Owen told you everything.

CECILY.

He does. What did she say?

POLLY.

Oh, don't let's talk about it!

CECILY.

What did she say?

POLLY (*miserably*).

She said that for some time—ever so long ago, you know—Owen was simply infatuated with Marie Doulton, and that he sent her flowers and fruit and candy——

COMEDIES IN MINIATURE

CECILY (*relieved*).

Oh, no, that was Ken!

POLLY.

Ken!

CECILY.

Oh, good heavens! I didn't mean to tell you just yet, dear, but you'd have to know it within a few hours anyway, so it doesn't make very much difference.

POLLY.

Have to know what?

CECILY.

About Ken.

POLLY.

What about Ken?

CECILY.

Why, you see, Ken was very much in love with Marie Doulton a few years ago, and nearly beggared himself sending her things——

POLLY.

No, that was Owen!

CECILY.

Wait, dear! But everybody thought that was all over. I don't think he has seen her since she went

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on the stage—(*doubtfully*) I don't *think* he has—and he was quite a boy when all this happened. So when he fell in love with you, we were all perfectly delighted. Oh, if I could only have known!

POLLY.

Known what? Cecily, what *are* you talking about?

CECILY.

This morning just before we told Owen of your engagement, he found out that Ken was sending flowers to Marie Doulton.

POLLY.

Cecily!

CECILY.

Oh, poor Polly! I'm so sorry! I—I wish it weren't true, but it is, and you must try to be brave about it, dear! He sent her five dozen roses.

POLLY.

I don't believe it!

CECILY.

Yes, dear, it's true. He told Owen to order them for him at Bauer's.

POLLY.

And was that the reason——

COMEDIES IN MINIATURE

CECILY.

That Owen didn't seem glad about the engagement? Yes. that's the reason.

POLLY (*piteously*).

Oh, there's some mistake! It couldn't be Ken! Why, Bess said it was Owen who was so much in love with her! She said he told her all about it, because she was such a friend of Miss Doulton's.

CECILY.

Owen told Bess?

POLLY.

Yes. Oh, you won't mind, Cecily! You mustn't mind now, because he loves you now! But it must have been Owen!

CECILY.

Well, it isn't Owen who's sending her five dozen roses to-day, anyway. It's Ken, for I saw the envelope that was to go with them, addressed in his writing. But—Polly, do you suppose Owen *was* in love with her?

POLLY (*in breaking tones*).

Oh, Cecily! Oh, Cecily, I want to go home! I want to go home! (*She drops into a chair, sob-*

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bing piteously. CECILY, with quivering lips, watches her for a moment, and then, kneeling beside her, gathers POLLY into her arms, and they weep together.)

CURTAIN.

PART II

Evening

The scene is the same.

Enter CECILY from the library, dressed for dinner. She takes up OWEN'S photograph, studies it, wipes away a tear and sighs. POLLY, also dressed for dinner, comes in from the hall and looks over CECILY'S shoulder.

CECILY (*mournfully*).

He doesn't look as if he'd deceive his wife, does he?

POLLY.

No, but one can't tell. I—I'd have trusted Ken anywhere! In the face of anything! (*Sobs.*)

CECILY (*tremulously*).

Now, Polly, don't give way again. You must be brave, you know, and whatever you do, don't let him see that it hurts! It—it's easier for you than it is for me, you see, for you—you haven't been married (*swallowing a sob*); and—and *I'm* not giving way!

POLLY.

No, but Owen hasn't been sending her flowers! I

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don't see why you care so much. I wouldn't care how many girls Ken had been in love with, if I were sure that he loved me better than any of them now. But to have him sending her flowers—*such* flowers, too!—the very day after he told me that—that—— (*Sobs.*)

CECILY.

But Owen has told me ever so many times that I was the only woman he ever really loved! Of course, I knew he had had his little flirtations, like other fellows, but I never supposed they were—like that!

POLLY.

Now, Cecily, don't give up! Don't! After all the trouble we took to cover up the traces, we mustn't cry any more! We might just as well laugh! It won't do any good to cry. Let's laugh! (*She laughs sobbingly, and wipes her eyes.*) Has Bess come home yet?

CECILY.

Yes; I think she's asleep, though. I rapped on her door, and she didn't answer. I wish she'd come down.

POLLY.

But you won't try to talk about this now, will you? You mustn't, for you'd cry, and you know we agreed that we'd go through dinner just as usual.

COMEDIES IN MINIATURE

CECILY.

Oh, yes, just as usual! We'll show them that other people can feel one thing and act another.

Enter BESS, in dinner dress, looking troubled.

CECILY.

Oh, Bess, I'm so glad you've come!

BESS (*taking CECILY'S hand sympathetically*).

You dear girl! You look tired, Cecily.

CECILY.

Oh, I've such a headache!

POLLY.

So've I!

BESS (*sighing*).

So've I!

CECILY.

Did you have a pleasant day?

BESS.

No; horrid!

CECILY.

So did I!

POLLY.

So did I!

CECILY.

Did you see—Miss Doulton?

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BESS.

Yes. . . . I don't think the stage has improved her any.

CECILY.

Don't you? Why?

BESS.

No, I don't! She's grown so—careless! There was a time when she wouldn't accept even flowers—awfully expensive ones, you know—from—well, from men who had no business to send them!

POLLY (*stifling a sob*).

From engaged men.

BESS (*glancing hastily at CECILY*).

Yes, or—from married men.

CECILY (*impulsively*).

Bess, is it true that Owen was in love with her?

BESS (*reproachfully*).

Polly!

POLLY (*hurriedly*).

I thought she knew about it, Bess, or I wouldn't have told her.

CECILY.

Is it true?

COMEDIES IN MINIATURE

BESS (*reluctantly*).

Well—he *was* rather attentive to her for a time.

CECILY.

And is it true that he sent her things all the time—flowers and candy and all that—and—and just *dangled* after her?

BESS (*impulsively*).

Yes, he did! It is true!

POLLY (*eagerly*).

Then it was Owen, after all, and not Ken?

BESS.

No, it was—both of them.

CECILY.

Both of them!

POLLY.

Both of them!

BESS.

Yes, both of them. For a long time they were rivals, and—why, don't you remember, Cecily, that for several months Owen and Ken were hardly on speaking terms? It was only after Owen became engaged to you that Ken really forgave him.

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CECILY.

And was that the reason? .

BESS.

That was the reason. They were both in love with her.

CECILY.

And he never told me! He said I was the only woman he had ever loved!

BESS (*bitterly*).

Well, that should have been enough! Any man who will say that to a woman, expecting her to believe it, is a confirmed flirt!

POLLY (*dolefully*).

Yes, that's true! Ken told me that he had *liked* lots of girls, but that he had never cared deeply for one before, and—he was in love with her, too! And I'd have trusted Ken anywhere!

BESS.

Oh, but Ken was only a boy! His devotion to her was rather funny—and really very pretty, too. It was intense while it lasted, but she's several years his senior, you know, so it wasn't very serious.

COMEDIES IN MINIATURE

POLLY.

Oh, but it was! And it is yet! He—he——
(*She bursts into tears.*)

BESS.

Why, Polly!

CECILY.

You see, Polly has just learned that Ken sent Marie Doulton a magnificent bunch of roses this morning.

BESS.

What? Ken!

POLLY (*hysterically*).

Yes, Ken!

CECILY.

He asked Owen to order them for him, because he had to go to Centerville.

BESS.

Roses! You're sure it wasn't orchids?

CECILY.

No, it was roses. Five dozen of the most expensive, he said.

BESS (*dropping into a chair*).

For heaven's sake!

MISS DOULTON'S ORCHIDS

CECILY.

And Owen told me about it. He was very angry.

BESS (*drily*).

Oh, was he.

CECILY.

Why, of course he was! Owen hates anything like that, you know.

BESS (*same tone*).

Yes, I know.

CECILY.

And I didn't mean to tell Polly, but it slipped out, and—she had to know it sooner or later, so it doesn't make much difference.

POLLY.

And Cecily and I have been crying all day——

CECILY.

Until we looked perfect frights——

POLLY.

And then we bathed our eyes and dressed——

CECILY.

Because we don't want them to suspect that we know until after dinner.

COMEDIES IN MINIATURE

POLLY.

We want to show them that we can be calm and dignified, even in the face of insult.

CECILY.

So we're going through the dinner just as if nothing had happened——

POLLY (*tremulously*).

We're going to be just as self-possessed as possible——

CECILY (*with a responsive tremor*).

Y-y-yes, we're not going to sh-sh-shed a tear——
(*She fumbles for her handkerchief.*)

POLLY.

Nor show any emotion——

CECILY.

Nor——nor anything! Where *is* my handkerchief!
(*Exit hurriedly, sobbing.*)

POLLY.

Oh, Bess, isn't it awful!

BESS.

It is that!

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POLLY.

Would you have believed it of Ken?

BESS.

Ken? Oh, he's not so bad. It's Owen!

POLLY.

Owen!

BESS.

Yes, Owen. Look here, Polly, I didn't mean to say anything about it, but—I don't know what to do. I saw Owen buying orchids for Miss Doulton.

POLLY.

Orchids!

BESS.

Yes, a great big box of them. A pretty price they must have cost him!

POLLY.

Maybe they were for Cecily.

BESS (*scornfully*).

For Cecily! Did you ever know a man to buy a box—so big (*illustrating*)—of orchids for his *wife*? Besides, I saw them in her room afterward.

COMEDIES IN MINIATURE

POLLY.

Did you see the roses, too? Ken never sent me five dozen roses!

BESS.

I don't know. Oh, yes, I suppose so! There were huge bunches of roses everywhere, but nothing compared with those orchids.

POLLY (*in tears*).

Oh, Bess! Oh, poor Cécily! Aren't men horrid! What shall we do?

BESS.

'Sh, here she comes! Polly! 'Sh! We mustn't tell her!

POLLY.

B-b-but I think she ought to know!

BESS (*doubtfully*).

Do you?

POLLY.

Yes, because if she finds out about it this time, it may prevent his doing it again.

BESS.

Well—I must think. Do hush, Polly!

POLLY (*hysterically*).

Oh, I ca-ca-a-a-an't!

MISS DOULTON'S ORCHIDS

BESS.

Then run away!

Enter CECILY from the library, wearing a determined smile.

CECILY.

Polly! You promised you wouldn't cry any more! Do go and bathe your eyes! (*Exit POLLY, weeping bitterly. CECILY continues resolutely.*) Now, I'm going to be cheerful. Let me see! I had something on my mind to tell you. Oh, yes, it was Gordon!

BESS.

His weight can't have oppressed you much!

CECILY.

Now, Bess, don't be hard on Gordon! He's a dear!

BESS.

To how many girls?

CECILY.

Well, as he says himself, he's been sort of a public benefactor. He's prevented a lot of us from throwing ourselves away on other fellows.

BESS.

Who wants to marry a safety-valve?

COMEDIES IN MINIATURE

CECILY.

But you see, the difference is just here. He never cared a thing in the world about one of us, and we all knew it; but he's desperately in love with you. You're the only woman he ever did love. He told me so himself.

BESS (*irritably*).

Good heavens! It's bad enough to have a man say that to one in the privacy of a proposal, but when he goes about advertising it to one's friends——!

CECILY.

But it's true! I've known Gordon for years, and you're the only girl he ever knew to whom he was afraid to propose.

BESS.

Is the man so sure I'd accept him?

CECILY.

Oh, Bess, don't be horrid! Gordon would make such a good husband!

BESS.

What am I that a miracle should be worked for me?

MISS DOULTON'S ORCHIDS

CECILY (*faintly smiling*).

Do you think it would be so hard for him to be a good husband?

BESS.

No harder than for any other man, I suppose.

CECILY.

Bess, sometimes I think you're getting bitter. You mustn't do that! There are some horrid men in the world, but there are some splendid ones, too! Now, there's Owen! Of course, he isn't perfect—if he were, I don't know what he'd do with me!—and I'm impatient with him sometimes, but—just the same, Owen is such a dear, faithful, considerate, unselfish fellow! I'd like to see you as happily married as I am!

BESS (*irrepressibly*).

Heaven forfend!

CECILY.

Why, *Bess!* You like Owen! You know he's good to me! Now, don't you? . . . Bess! You do, don't you? (*She touches Bess's shoulder persuasively.*)

BESS (*choking with tears*).

Don't, Cecily! Let me go!

COMEDIES IN MINIATURE

CECILY (*holding Bess's arm*).

Bess! Bess! What do you mean? What is it? Tell me! (*BESS shakes her head and tries in vain to pull away.*) You shall tell me! What is it?

BESS.

Nothing!

Enter POLLY.

CECILY.

It is! It's something about Owen! Isn't it? (*Shakes BESS a little.*) Isn't it? Do you know anything *more* about Owen that I don't know? Don't you think Owen is good to me? *Bess!*

POLLY.

Oh, tell her, Bess! She'll find out some day, anyway, and then we'll wish we had warned her now.

CECILY.

Polly! You know?

BESS (*dully*).

Yes, Polly knows. I saw Owen buying an immense box of orchids at Bauer's——

CECILY.

Roses, you mean.

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BESS.

No, I don't; I mean orchids. And later, I saw the same box brought to Marie Doulton.

CECILY.

Oh—oh, there's some mistake! He bought them for Ken.

POLLY (*bursting into tears again*).

Ken ordered roses! Oh, and I'd have trusted Ken through anything!

BESS.

When Marie opened them, I said: "What magnificent flowers!" and she laughed and replied: "Yes; poor boy! He still sends them." I said: "I saw him buying them. Do you think you have any right to accept them—now?" and she laughed again, in a careless sort of way, and said: "Well, I've told him not to send them, but he will do it; and what woman could refuse flowers like that?"

CECILY (*breathlessly*).

Bess!

BESS.

And then I came away. I—I couldn't stay in the room with them!

CECILY (*piteously*).

Oh, Bess!

COMEDIES IN MINIATURE

BESS.

And that's all. (*POLLY sobs and CECILY stares straight before her, as if stunned.*) And I thank heaven (*a little wildly*) that I'm not married to any man! (*Sobs chokingly.*)

POLLY.

Bess, I believe you care for some one, too!

BESS (*hurriedly*).

No, no, no! Not in the least! You understand, Polly? Not in the least! (*CECILY blindly extends her hand to BESS, who holds it tightly. POLLY sobs disconsolately.*)

Enter GORDON, from the veranda. The girls all spring to their feet and turn their faces away from him.

GORDON (*cheerfully*).

Ah, I *thought* I heard voices! Why don't you come out on the veranda? It's fine! Well, I've got the seats for to-morrow night. We'll have a great time, eh? (*Looks from one to another.*) Why doesn't somebody say something? Overcome at the prospect of seeing the great beauty, Cecily?

CECILY.

I—I shall not see her. I'm not going.

(*Exit hurriedly.*)

MISS DOULTON'S ORCHIDS

GORDON.

Not going! Not going to see Marie Douulton?
What's up? You wouldn't miss it, Miss Winslow?

POLLY.

Nothing on earth would tempt me to go!

(Exit hurriedly.)

GORDON.

Eh? Oh, I say! Why, see here, Miss Maynard,
what does this mean? It's a joke, isn't it? They
don't mean it seriously?

BESS.

They mean it very seriously.

GORDON.

And you——?

BESS.

I mean it also.

GORDON.

By Jove! What's up?

BESS.

We shall leave the contemplation of Miss Douulton's
charms to the men of the household.

GORDON.

Why, I thought she was a friend of yours!

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BESS.

She was—until to-day.

GORDON.

Oh, I see! You—er—disagreed, and the girls are resenting it with you. Sort of a sympathetic strike.

BESS.

On the contrary, I am only a sympathiser—but my sympathies are active!

GORDON.

I'm glad to hear that, for I'm in need of them. I—I—oh, Bess, I can't lead up to it, but you must see how it is with me!

BESS.

Oh, don't! (*Covers her face with her hands.*)

GORDON,

I know. You think I'm a sublime fraud and not to be trusted——

BESS (*wearily, lifting her head*).

Perhaps you're as much to be trusted as any man.

GORDON (*hopefully*).

Bess!

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BESS.

But there's not a man on earth I'd trust to the extent of marrying him. Not one!

GORDON (*falling back*).

Bess!

BESS.

To you, we are all toys, kept for an otherwise idle hour. Your code is not our code; your ideals are not our ideals; your honour—thank heaven!—is not our honour.

GORDON (*simply*).

I don't think I understand.

BESS (*bitterly*).

Perhaps your friends, Mr. Belknap and Mr. Moore, will explain.

GORDON.

I may have been unfortunate enough to have offended you (BESS *shakes her head*), or some other man, of whom I know nothing, may have destroyed your faith in him, but it is not just—nor is it like you—to condemn the innocent with the guilty. Some of us—most of us, perhaps—are not all that we might be, but Owen Belknap and Kenneth Moore are two as straight fellows as the Lord ever made!

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BESS.

Which completes the circle and brings us back to the starting-point.

GORDON.

Do you mean to tell me that you would not trust Owen?

BESS.

I do.

GORDON.

Nor Ken?

BESS.

I do.

GORDON.

Of course, you think you have reason?

BESS.

I have reason.

GORDON (*shaking his head*).

There's some mistake. Owen and Ken are absolutely to be trusted.

BESS (*impulsively*).

Which is the reason that Kenneth, who was madly in love with Marie Doulton for two years, sent her a magnificent bunch of roses to-day, although his engagement to Polly Winslow was announced only this morning!

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GORDON.

What!

BESS.

That is quite true. Cecily saw the envelope, holding Ken's card and addressed in his writing, which was to go with them, and Owen ordered the flowers at Ken's request.

GORDON.

Owen ordered the flowers! But don't you see, that in itself is Kenneth's vindication! The fact that he told Owen proves——

BESS (*hopefully*).

Oh, do you think so? (*Dejectedly*.) Owen doesn't take that view of it.

GORDON.

Do you mean to say that Owen believes—? (BESS *nods*.) But surely he disapproved?

BESS.

Oh, yes, he disapproved—violently! He said various condemnatory things to Cecily—and then went and ordered a box of orchids for Miss Doulton that completely overshadowed Ken's roses. I happened to see him selecting them.

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GORDON.

They couldn't have been for Miss Doulton. They must have been for Cecily.

BESS.

Unfortunately, I was with Miss Doulton when they arrived.

GORDON.

Then he substituted orchids for roses in filling Ken's order.

BESS.

To what purpose? Ken said roses; and the shops are full of them. You may not know that Owen, also, was very much in love with Miss Doulton at one time. In fact, he and Kenneth had a very bitter quarrel about her.

GORDON.

There's some absurd mistake in all this. Kenneth's a good deal of a kid—but he's not a *cad*; and as for Owen—oh, it's impossible! Did you see Owen's card with the orchids?

BESS.

It wasn't necessary. I saw him select and pay for them; and Miss Doulton admitted that she had forbidden him to continue sending them, but said he *would* do it.

MISS DOULTON'S ORCHIDS

GORDON.

I tell you, there's some mistake!

BESS.

How about the roses that Ken asked Owen to order?
I suppose that's a mistake, too?

GORDON.

I still think that the very fact that he confided in
Owen proves the integrity of his motive.

BESS.

He probably counted on the honour that prevails
among thieves—(*bitterly*) and Owen failed him,
even there!

GORDON.

I'll never believe it until they tell me themselves.
. . . I suppose Cecily and Miss Winslow know
all this?

BESS.

Yes.

GORDON (*gravely*).

And is this the cause of your bitter denunciation
of all men?

BESS.

Isn't it enough? If Owen and Ken are not to be
trusted——

COMEDIES IN MINIATURE

GORDON.

But they are to be trusted! Believe me, they are!
(*BESS shakes her head, but less positively.*) If I prove it—if I prove that this is all a mistake, will you grant, also, that perhaps I am more earnest than I have been painted, and give me a chance?

BESS (*faltering*).

But I saw——

GORDON.

Never mind what you saw! If I prove that Owen and Ken are trustworthy, will you trust me, too?

BESS.

If you can prove that Ken did not order five dozen roses sent to Marie Doulton this morning, and if you can prove that Owen did not send the orchids that I saw him pay for, that I saw delivered, and that she admitted she ought not to accept, I'll——

GORDON.

Yes?

BESS (*laughing nervously*).

I'll believe anything else you choose to tell me!
(*Exit to library.*)

GORDON.

Whew! (*Sits and shakes his head dubiously.*)

MISS DOULTON'S ORCHIDS

Enter KENNETH from the veranda.

GORDON.

Hullo, you young jackanapes! Where've you been all day?

KENNETH (*disgustedly*).

Centerville. Where are the girls?

GORDON.

Well, you'd better have been at home, 'tending to your knitting work.

KENNETH.

Couldn't help it. It was business.

Enter POLLY from the hall.

KENNETH.

That idiot of an agent up there—oh, here's Polly!
(*Advances eagerly toward her.*)

POLLY (*coldly, avoiding him*).

Good evening.

KENNETH.

Eh? I say, what's up?

GORDON (*watching keenly*).

As I said, Kenneth, you dropped a stitch and your

COMEDIES IN MINIATURE

knitting work got tangled in your absence. Now, how about——

Enter CECILY from the library.

KENNETH (*eagerly*).

Hullo, Cecily! What's wrong? (*CECILY turns her back on him.*) Well, by Jove, I think you might tell a fellow!

GORDON.

I'm trying, with what patience is in me, to explain——

Enter OWEN from the veranda. He carries a box of carnations.

KENNETH.

I say, Owen! What's wrong?

OWEN (*going at once to CECILY*).

Well, sweetheart? (*She slips past him, with a reproachful glance.*) What's the matter, dear? Here; I brought you some carnations. (*Her glance becomes scornful and she steps back.*) Why, what's the matter?

KENNETH.

Well, that's what I want to know! Here I come in, after a deuce of a day at Centerville, and they

MISS DOULTON'S ORCHIDS

all treat me as if I were a convict! And you seem to be equally unpopular! Oh, here comes Bess!

Enter BESS from the veranda.

KENNETH.

Say, Bess, what's wrong?

BESS.

You'd better ask what's right? It would indicate a more hopeful condition of your moral sense!

OWEN.

But see here——!

KENNETH.

Well, I swear! Gordon, do you know anything about this?

GORDON.

No; but I hope to untangle it. It's primarily about some orchids, I believe.

KENNETH (*puzzled*).

Orchids!

GORDON.

Now, this is Owen's knitting work, Ken. You keep out.

OWEN.

Well, what about them?

COMEDIES IN MINIATURE

GORDON.

You sent some to Miss Doulton?

OWEN.

No, *I* didn't send them. That is—— (*Hesitates.*)

BESS.

Owen Belknap!

GORDON (*patiently*).

Now, if you please, Miss Maynard, this is *my* demonstration. Yours will come later—I hope. (*BESS bites her lip.*) Now, Owen? You didn't send them?

OWEN.

No, I—well (*glancing at POLLY*), I'd rather not explain here. What about them, anyway?

GORDON.

Well, if you have any explanation to offer, you'd better get about it. Right here, too. A hypothetical cat seems to have escaped from an equally hypothetical bag, but there's no secret about it. I'm right, ladies? There's no secrecy? Now, Owen.

OWEN (*troubled*).

But—you see—— (*He hesitates and looks at KENNETH.*)

MISS DOULTON'S ORCHIDS

KENNETH.

Out with it, Owen! If you hold the key to this mystery, for heaven's sake, produce it!

OWEN.

Well, it's simply this. I ordered those orchids at Ken's request, but why you should stand me up and——

CECILY.

Oh, *Owen!*

KENNETH.

I didn't say orchids! I said roses! (*POLLY bursts into tears.*)

OWEN.

I know you did. You said you wanted five dozen, of the choicest variety. You also informed me (*sarcastically*) that expense was no object, and as Bauer had not five dozen fine roses of one kind in his shop, and as he had some particularly good orchids, I thought I'd satisfy your desire for a large bill, so I ordered the orchids sent with your card. But I must say, Kenneth (*severely*)——

KENNETH (*aghast*).

With *my* card!

CECILY (*patting OWEN'S arm*).

Oh, I knew all the time there must be some such

COMEDIES IN MINIATURE

explanation! I didn't really believe it for a moment! Bess, you might have known!

POLLY (*sobbing*).

And I'd have trusted Ken through *anything*!

KENNETH.

Now, look here! You people don't think, for one minute——

CECILY.

Oh, we all *know* what *you* did!

BESS.

Polly, dear, don't! (*She tries to soothe sobbing POLLY.*)

KENNETH (*hotly*).

I suppose you all think that because I ordered some roses sent to Marie Douulton, I'm a double-faced scoundrel, don't you?

CECILY.

Some roses!

KENNETH.

I suppose you've all been retailing the story of my youthful infatuation and sitting in judgment upon me, haven't you? You've even been torturing Polly about it—and (*sorrowfully*) she believed you!

MISS DOULTON'S ORCHIDS

CECILY.

Well, but you told Owen——.

KENNETH.

Of course I told Owen! I'll tell all of you if you'll keep still long enough to hear it! I got a letter from Fred Grover this morning—he's down at his mother's, sick——

(POLLY springs up, her face lighting.)

BESS.

Oh, well, never mind——

GORDON.

The defendant has the stand!

KENNETH.

He said Marie had refused him again——

CECILY.

Well, is that any reason why *you* should send her five dozen roses? Just after——

POLLY.

Oh, Cecily, *do* keep still! Don't you see? They were for him!

KENNETH.

That's it! They were for Fred!

COMEDIES IN MINIATURE

POLLY.

Oh, Ken!

CECILY.

But the card!

KENNETH.

Was his, I suppose. *I didn't look at it. All I did was to put her address on the envelope.*

POLLY.

Oh, *Ken!* (*She runs off to the veranda, pursued by KENNETH.*)

CECILY.

Then all this has been— Oh, Owen! (*She looks penitently at him and extends an entreating hand, which he takes tenderly. They disappear in the library.*)

GORDON.

Miss Maynard, I submit that I have proved my case.

BESS.

Wasn't it rather—vicarious?

GORDON.

Nevertheless, it is proved. *Now* will you believe——

MISS DOULTON'S ORCHIDS

BESS

(*breathlessly, making one last stand for her convictions*).

All but one thing. Don't ever attempt to convince me that—that——

GORDON (*eagerly impatient*).

Well?

BESS.

That I'm the *only* woman you ever loved!

GORDON (*with triumphant conviction*).

But you are! (*He steps toward her with outstretched arms.*)

QUICK CURTAIN.

THE BURGLAR

THE BURGLAR

A Comedy in One Act

CHARACTERS

Mrs. John Burton, the hostess.

Mrs. Valerie Armsby, a young widow.

Mrs. Charles Dover, a bride.

Miss Freda Dixon.

Miss Edith Brent.

The cottage occupied by MRS. BURTON is one of the flimsy structures erected by the owners of popular summer hotels, in which guests may gain in privacy what they lose in protection from fire, flood, and thievery.

The sitting-room, a rectangular apartment, having little to recommend it architecturally, is lined with doors, one of which leads to the veranda, others opening into the bedrooms used by MRS. BURTON and her guests. There are several windows.

The furniture is mainly of wicker and rattan, a few photographs and lightly framed water-colors break the monotony of the walls, a writing-table is supplied with somewhat luxurious fittings, and MRS. BURTON has contrived, by the judicious importation of cushions, vases, bits of drapery, etc., to imbue the bleak little room with a suggestion of her own gracious femininity.

MABEL DOVER, a diminutive and impetuous brunette, sits at the table, writing. She reads her letter, kisses it, folds, addresses, seals, and stamps it. Then she yawns wearily. After listening in vain for approaching steps, she puts in order the papers littering the table, and yawns again. Pres-

COMEDIES IN MINIATURE

ently women's voices are heard outside. MABEL smiles and turns expectantly toward the door leading to the veranda.

Enter PEGGY BURTON, sensitive, nervous, and impulsive; VALERIE ARMSBY, optimistic and calm; brisk, competent, cheery FREDA DIXON, and EDITH BRENT, a slender, fragile, big-eyed, soft-voiced girl, whose gentle manner is almost deprecating. They are talking excitedly.

VALERIE.

Well, I should think it would have turned her hair grey! Imagine waking out of a sound sleep to find a man in one's room! Ugh!

FREDA.

Oh, he wasn't in her room! He was just in the doorway.

MABEL.

In whose room?

EDITH.

Yes, he was just going, with all her rings and pins and things.

MABEL.

Whose rings?

PEGGY.

No, that wasn't the way at all! She told me herself. He was——

THE BURGLAR

MABEL.

Who was? Girls, what are you talking about?

PEGGY.

Oh, Mabel, you should have been with us! The most awful thing has happened!

MABEL.

Oh, what was it?

PEGGY.

The Endicott's cottage was burglarised last night——

EDITH.

And she woke just as the man was leaving the room with all her things!

MABEL.

Oh!

VALERIE.

No, she saw him standing before her dressing-table, taking her——

FREDA.

Not at all! The man was just in the doorway——

EDITH.

Yes, just leaving.

PEGGY.

No, that wasn't the way at all! She told me all about it herself.

COMEDIES IN MINIATURE

MABEL.

Did he really get all her things?

VALERIE.

Yes, every single piece of jewelry she had here, except her watch. That was under her pillow.

MABEL.

Oh, how awful!

FREDA.

He took all her rings.

PEGGY.

Except her wedding-ring. She never takes that off.

EDITH.

And all her pins. You remember that lovely diamond crescent?

MABEL.

Oh, did he get that?

PEGGY.

Yes, and her necklace with the ruby pendant.

FREDA.

Well, I think she deserves to lose them! The idea of keeping all those valuable things in a little flimsy cottage! Why didn't she take them to the hotel and have them put in the safe?

THE BURGLAR

VALERIE.

Well, she'd been entertaining the ^{bride's} ~~whist~~ club in the
afternoon, and she had a lot of people to dinner,
and so she wanted those things to wear.

EDITH.

And when her guests were gone, she was tired and
thought she wouldn't bother about the things until
morning.

FREDA.

Well, it's excessively bad taste to wear that sort
of thing in the country, anyway.

VALERIE.

That doesn't alter the fact that she lost them all,
and was nearly frightened to death besides.

MABEL.

Do *somebody* tell me what happened!

(*The others all speak at once, as follows.*)

VALERIE.

Well, she woke and saw——

FREDA.

He was in the doorway when——

COMEDIES IN MINIATURE

EDITH.

She was awakened by a queer sound——

PEGGY.

Well, she told me herself——

*(There is dead silence, as they look indignantly
from one to another.)*

MABEL.

Oh, if you're *all* going to talk at once!

VALERIE.

Well, you see——

EDITH.

It was just this way——

FREDA.

Her brother told me——

PEGGY.

Well, *she* told me! Now, *will* you listen! It happened just this way. She woke all at once—as if she'd been called, don't you know?—with the feeling that some one was in her room. You know; a sort of creepy, startled, awful feeling!

EDITH (*shuddering*).

Oh, just think of it!

THE BURGLAR

PEGGY.

And then she heard footsteps—slow, stealthy sort of steps—

MABEL (*glancing over her shoulder*).

Oh! Go on!

PEGGY.

And then—it was bright moonlight and the curtains were up—she saw *a man* coming into her room!

MABEL (*shrilly screaming*).

Oh!

EDITH.

No, he was going out.

VALERIE.

No, he was already in!

PEGGY (*firmly*).

He was just entering. She told me so herself.

FREDA.

Her brother told me that the man was just in the doorway, going out.

EDITH.

Yes, he was.

PEGGY (*crushingly*).

Well, as her brother wasn't there and she was, perhaps you'll admit that she's the better authority.

COMEDIES IN MINIATURE

And she lay there, stiff with fright, and watched that man go to her dressing-table and take all her lovely things, and she never made a sound!

EDITH.

Oh, I don't see how she could keep still!

MABEL (*promptly*).

Oh, I do! When I'm frightened, I simply can't scream! It seems to paralyse my vocal chords.

FREDA.

What good would it do to scream, I'd like to know? He was already out of her room.

PEGGY.

Freda! You are so obstinate! He was just entering the room, and if she had screamed it would have frightened him away.

FREDA.

Well, maybe it would and maybe it wouldn't! I once heard of a woman who screamed at a burglar, and he jumped over to the bed and choked her into insensibility. (*The others huddle together with nervous ejaculations.*) Catch me making any fuss if I see a burglar! He can just take everything there is, as long as he doesn't disturb me, and I'll not try to stop him!

THE BURGLAR

PEGGY (*irritably*).

Yes, and I verily believe it wouldn't "disturb" you, as you say, if he took every earthly thing you possessed!

FREDA (*laughing*).

Oh, well—! Come on, girls, let's go to bed.

PEGGY, EDITH.

To bed?

FREDA (*yawning*).

Yes, it's all hours.

PEGGY.

Go to bed—with that man at large?

MABEL.

Oh! Didn't they catch him?

VALERIE.

No, she never made a sound until he was well out of the way.

MABEL (*shrilly*).

And they haven't found him yet?

FREDA.

No, they can't even find a clue.

MABEL.

Oh, girls! And you left me here all alone, this whole evening! How could you!

COMEDIES IN MINIATURE

VALERIE.

Why didn't you come with us?

MABEL.

I wanted to write to Charlie.

FREDA (*mischievously*).

To Charlie! Why, you spent the whole morning writing to him!

MABEL.

Certainly; but I couldn't tell him this morning what happened this afternoon, could I?

VALERIE.

And I suppose you'll spend to-morrow morning writing him what happened during the night?

PEGGY (*shuddering*).

Oh, don't, Val! It sounds as if you expected a burglar *here!*

MABEL (*with dignity*).

I shall certainly write him about this affair.

FREDA.

But he's coming down to-morrow, isn't he?

MABEL.

Yes, but he'll get the letter just before he starts,

THE BURGLAR

you know; and, oh (*with a sobbing breath*), when Charlie gets here, I sha'n't have to stay all alone in a great, empty house, with burglars and murderers and—and *brigands*—all around me!

VALERIE (*shrugging her shoulders*).

Well, "you pays your money and you takes your choice"! You might have come with us.

EDITH (*her arm around MABEL*).

I think you girls are perfectly heartless! Poor Mabel might have been horribly frightened!

MABEL.

Yes, or even murdered!

FREDA.

Well, anyhow, she wasn't; and I don't believe there's any danger anyway.

PEGGY.

Freda! You aren't really going to bed!

FREDA.

Why, of course I am! Aren't you?

PEGGY.

No!

FREDA.

Nor you, Mabel?

COMEDIES IN MINIATURE

MABEL.

I—I—don't know. I was very sleepy before you came, but—oh, (*whimpering*) I wish Charlie would come!

FREDA.

You're not afraid, Val?

VALERIE (*glancing over her shoulder*).

Oh, no! No, I—I'm not *afraid*.

PEGGY.

Oh, I wouldn't go to bed for anything! Not after this!

FREDA (*drily*).

Going to spend the remainder of your life looking four ways at once for a burglar? It won't improve your appearance.

MABEL.

Oh, and Charlie's coming to-morrow, too! I must manage to get some sleep or I'll look like a perfect ghost!

FREDA.

Now, you girls go to bed sensibly. It's extremely unlikely that there will be another burglary to-night; and, anyway, we have nothing to tempt a thief.

PEGGY.

We have our rings.

THE BURGLAR

FREDA.

Yes, but that's all. Now, go on! Go to bed!

PEGGY (*looking at the others*). *start*

Will you, girls? Do you think we'd better?

EDITH (*tremulously*).

Oh, I'm so frightened!

MABEL.

Oh, I wish Charlie had come to-night!

PEGGY.

I shall never let Jack leave me in the summer again! In town, I don't mind—so much, but it's horrible to be left unprotected like this in the country!

VALERIE.

Well, I don't see why that woman didn't scream last night, so somebody could catch the thief.

PEGGY.

Nor I. So selfish of her! Just because she was a little frightened, she subjects all of us to this awful danger!

FREDA.

Pouf! There isn't a bit of danger! I'm going to bed. Good night. (*She goes to her door.*)

COMEDIES IN MINIATURE

PEGGY.

Aren't you really a bit afraid, Freda?

FREDA.

No, of course I'm not! There's nothing to be afraid of! Good night. (*She enters her room, closing the door after her.*)

EDITH.

Are you going to bed, Peggy?

PEGGY.

No—yes—oh, I don't know! Oh, I want Jack!

MABEL.

If Charlie had only come to-night!

PEGGY.

Well, why didn't you arrange it? He might have come just as well as not, as far as I'm concerned.

MABEL.

Why, Peggy! Your invitation was for him to come from Saturday to Monday.

PEGGY (*impatiently*). *stop*

Well, suppose it was? You might have known that we should need a man here! I thought only of

stop THE BURGLAR *have this*

Charlie's business. Jack never can get away Friday night.

MABEL (*complacently*).

Charlie has no business that interferes with his duty to me!

PEGGY (*irritably*).

Well, why isn't he here, then? Heaven knows, if ever you needed him, it's now!

VALERIE.

Oh, well, Freda's probably right. I dare say there isn't an atom of danger. Come on! Let's go to bed.

MABEL.

Suppose he should come in the night. What should we do?

EDITH.

Scream!

MABEL.

Oh, I couldn't! I can't make a sound when I'm frightened!

PEGGY.

I heard of a woman who screamed at a burglar one night until she permanently injured her vocal chords, and her voice was never the same again.

MABEL, VALERIE.

O-oh!

COMEDIES IN MINIATURE

EDITH.

My mother once knew a woman who lay perfectly still while a burglar felt under the mattress on which she lay and took out some silver; and when she tried to scream she couldn't! Her throat, or something, was paralysed, and she didn't recover her voice for more than a year.

MABEL, ^X PEGGY.

Oh, Edith!

FREDA (*in her own room, sleepily*).

Oh, girls, *do* go to bed! Mabel, you'll be a fright to-morrow if you don't get some sleep!

MABEL.

That's so—and Charlie's coming! Well (*desperately*), I'm going! Good night, girls.

THE OTHERS.

Good night.

(MABEL *pauses a moment by her door, peeps cautiously into her room, and goes out. Something falls in FREDA'S room. MABEL runs on again, screaming shrilly. The girls clutch one another and listen without breathing.*)

MABEL (*whispering*).

Oh, what was that?

THE BURGLAR

PEGGY.

I—I don't know.

VALERIE (*cautiously, at FREDA's door*).

Freda! Freda, did you hear that?

FREDA (*in her room*).

Hear what?

VALERIE.

That noise.

FREDA.

Why, of course I did! I dropped my shoe.

(*The girls separate, foolishly laughing.*)

PEGGY.

Oh, certainly! I thought—I *thought* it sounded like a shoe!

VALERIE.

With a man's foot in it! What geese we were!

(*MABEL goes to her door and peeps in again.*)

Oh, go on, Mabel! We're all here, and wide awake.

There's no danger, anyway. (*MABEL goes out.*)

PEGGY.

Why, that's so! Burglars always wait for the lights to be out, don't they? I'll tell you what we'll do! We'll leave a light here all night.

COMEDIES IN MINIATURE

VALERIE.

Why, of course!

FREDA (*in her room*).

Girls, *please* go to bed!

Enter MABEL, *wearing a charming dressing-gown.*

PEGGY (*alarmed*).

What's the matter?

MABEL (*whispering*).

I'm going to hide my rings, each in a different place, so if he finds one I'll still have the rest.

PEGGY.

Oh, splendid! (*They tiptoe about, apprehensively glancing to right and left, and hide their rings in all sorts of absurd places. PEGGY slips one under a rug, and MABEL, standing on a chair, hangs a glowing ruby on a pin which she has thrust into the wall. Presently she nods to the girls and returns to her room.*)

VALERIE (*yawning*).

Well, I'm getting sleepy, too. Good night, girls.

PEGGY.

Oh, Val, don't leave us!

THE BURGLAR

start

VALERIE.

You go to! To bed, I mean! Good night.
(*Exit to her room.*)

PEGGY.

Oh, Edith, I'm so frightened! You come and sleep with me.

EDITH.

Oh, no! I'd be awfully afraid in your room! It has those long windows opening on the side porch. He might come in there. You come and sleep with me.

PEGGY.

Oh, not for worlds! I shouldn't sleep a wink in that room! It's at the back of the house, and burglars always come in from the back.

EDITH.

Well——

PEGGY.

Well——

EDITH (*reluctantly*).

Good night, then.

PEGGY.

Good night. (*They tiptoe to their doors and pause.*)

EDITH (*whispering*).

Did you hear anything?

COMEDIES IN MINIATURE

PEGGY.

No. Did you?

EDITH.

No.

(Nodding reassuringly at each other they go out.)

PEGGY reappears again immediately, tiptoes to each window to see that it is fastened, tries the door leading to the veranda, listens at each bed-room door, and is about to re-enter her room when EDITH, entering suddenly from her own apartment, gives utterance to strange, inarticulate sounds.

PEGGY (*startled*).

Oh! Good gracious, Edith!

EDITH (*panting*).

Oh, Peggy, how you frightened me! What are you doing?

PEGGY.

I came to see if everything was all right. Mabel's light's out and Freda's asleep. I can tell by her breathing.

EDITH.

I'm sorry I screamed and startled you.

PEGGY.

You didn't scream.

THE BURGLAR

EDITH.

Oh, yes, I did! When I saw you. It frightened me so.

VALERIE *creeps cautiously in, in negligee.*

VALERIE (*relieved*).

Oh, girls, it's you!

PEGGY, EDITH (*in alarm*).

Did you hear anything?

VALERIE.

Well, I thought I did—but probably it was you.

EDITH.

It was I. I came out and found Peggy here—and I screamed.

PEGGY.

You didn't scream at all! You just made a funny, choking sound.

EDITH.

Nonsense! You were so frightened yourself you don't know what I did! I simply shrieked!

VALERIE.

I didn't hear you.

EDITH.

Well, I *did!* I always scream when I'm frightened. I can't help it.

COMEDIES IN MINIATURE

PEGGY.

Well——

VALERIE.

Well, good night.

PEGGY, EDITH.

Good night.

PEGGY (*pausing at her door*).

Listen! What was that?

EDITH (*at her door*).

What?

VALERIE (*at her door*).

I didn't hear anything.

PEGGY.

Oh, didn't you? Oh, well—good night.

(They all go out.)

*
After a pause, there is heard the sound of a falling body in MABEL'S room. A momentary silence is followed by piercing shrieks from MABEL, who runs on, wrapping a bath-robe about her and still wildly screaming. PEGGY, EDITH, and VALERIE, all in negligee, enter hastily. EDITH gasps convulsively and clutches her throat.

THE BURGLAR

PEGGY (*hysterically*).

Oh, what was it? Oh, Mabel, did you see anything?

MABEL.

Didn't you hear it? O-oh! (*Screams.*) Oh! Oh!

VALERIE.

Of course we heard it!

Enter FREDA, wearing a bath-robe and blinking sleepily.

VALERIE.

Oh, Freda, did you hear it?

FREDA.

Hear what? What was it?

EDITH.

Oh, I don't know!

PEGGY.

It was—a man!

MABEL (*screaming*).

Oh! Did you see him?

PEGGY.

I—I don't know. I think I did. I'm sure I saw a shadow steal across my curtain just before——

COMEDIES IN MINIATURE

MABEL.

He was in my room! (*Screams.*)

FREDA.

Are you sure?

VALERIE.

Did you see him?

PEGGY.

How do you know?

EDITH.

Did he touch you?

MABEL.

No, but he was there! He knocked something off the table, and then—I sat up in bed and listened, and, girls—I heard him breathe! (*The girls crowd together, cowering and exclaiming.*)

WARNING

PEGGY.

Oh, what shall we do?

FREDA (*severely*).

Peggy, you ought to have a telephone in the house for just such emergencies, if for nothing else. (*A slight creaking makes them all start nervously.*)

FX FX
March
Sound

MABEL.

Oh, did you hear anything?

THE BURGLAR

PEGGY.

Yes, didn't you?

FREDA.

It was just the house creaking, I think.

VALERIE (*uncertainly*).

Yes, of course, that was it?

PEGGY.

Did you see the man, Freda?

FREDA.

I was asleep. The first thing I heard was Mabel screaming.

MABEL (*indignantly*).

I didn't scream! I never scream when I'm frightened! I can't!

EDITH.

I screamed, Freda.

VALERIE.

No, you didn't. You just gurgled a little, but Mabel shrieked!

MABEL.

I didn't! O-o-oh! (*Screams and clutches* FREDA.)
What was that? I saw something moving in my room. Oh, girls, he's in there!

COMEDIES IN MINIATURE

PEGGY.

Oh, what shall I do? Oh, I'll never let Jack leave me again!

MABEL (*moaning*).

Oh, Charlie! Charlie!

VALERIE.

Well, what are we going to do?

FREDA.

We might pull the door suddenly shut and lock it.

PEGGY.

Oh, he might set fire to the house!

EDITH.

He'd surely steal all Mabel's things, then!

VALERIE.

He'd escape through the window.

MABEL.

Besides, the key's on the inside.

FREDA.

We might blow a police-whistle.

PEGGY.

Oh, no! We'd have to stand at the window to make

THE BURGLAR

anybody hear us, and then he might—shoot us!
(EDITH and MABEL *moan.*)

FREDA.

We might— Peggy, is Jack's revolver down here?

PEGGY.

Yes, but—oh, Freda, you won't use that? You mustn't, Freda! You might shoot somebody!

FREDA (*grimly*).

That's what guns are for. Go and get it.

PEGGY (*whimpering*).

Oh, no, Freda!

EDITH.

Oh, I'm so frightened!

MABEL (*sobbing*).

Don't, Freda! Don't!

FREDA.

He has a shotgun, too, hasn't he?

PEGGY.

Yes.

FREDA.

Where is it?

COMEDIES IN MINIATURE

PEGGY.

In my room.

FREDA.

Bring that, too.

PEGGY (*pleadingly*).

Oh, Freda!

VALERIE.

What are you going to do, Freda?

FREDA.

I'm going to help capture that man, if I can.

VALERIE.

Oh, he isn't there now! He's surely gone out of a window by this time, we've made such a fuss!

PEGGY.

Oh, do you think so? Listen!

MABEL (*hysterically*).

O-oh! Girls, I hear something! Don't you hear something?

FREDA.

Keep still, Mabel! Peggy, go and get that gun.

PEGGY.

Oh, no, Freda! Oh! (*loudly, turning toward MA-*

THE BURGLAR

BEL's *open door*) won't you please go 'way? We won't hurt you if——

FREDA (*sternly*).

Peggy! If that man's in the house, we ought to keep him here until the police come.

PEGGY.

Well, I don't see why! If he'll go away peacefully, that's all I'll ask of him.

FREDA.

But we ought to see that he's captured.

PEGGY.

What are the police for? Let them catch him! I don't want anything to do with it!

FREDA.

But if we let him escape again, he'll terrify—and perhaps murder—other women.

MABEL.

Oh, Freda! (*Screams.*)

PEGGY.

Well, perhaps *they'll* have some men to protect them. We can't send word to anybody until morning.

COMEDIES IN MINIATURE

FREDA.

Then we'll keep him here all night.

THE OTHERS (*in consternation*).

All night!

FREDA (*firmly*).

All night! We have no right to let him escape, as Mrs. Endicott did, to repeat this sort of thing. Peggy, the guns!

PEGGY (*whimpering*).

Oh, I'm afraid!

FREDA.

I'll go with you, then. Come! (*She pulls the reluctant PEGGY toward the door, where they pause a moment listening, and then enter PEGGY's room.*)

MABEL.

Oh, I wonder if he's in there still? I heard him breathe!

VALERIE.

And Peggy said she saw him go across the veranda. She saw his shadow on her curtain!

EDITH.

I heard a queer sound, too. Girls! The bath is next my room, and I believe that window was left open!

THE BURGLAR

VALERIE.

It was. It's always open. It's stuck in the casing and can't be moved.

MABEL.

Then that's where he got in.

EDITH.

He must have come right through this room! (*They huddle together.*) He must have entered Mabel's room by that door.

MABEL.

Oh, I might have been murdered in my bed! (*A sound as of something striking the floor firmly is heard in PEGGY's room.*) O-oh! O-o-oh! Did you hear that?

EDITH.

Oh, maybe he's in *there* now! Maybe (*gasping*) he's killing the girls!

VALERIE.

Oh, no, he couldn't—could he? One of them would scream!

Enter PEGGY and FRED A. PEGGY carries the shotgun tremblingly before her, and FRED A flourishes a revolver. As they appear, the others all cower, with exclamations.

COMEDIES IN MINIATURE

VALERIE.

Oh, oh, Freda!

MABEL.

Oh, don't! Oh, *don't!*

EDITH.

Oh, girls! Peggy! Peggy!

FREDA.

Now, if that man's in Mabel's room, we'll do what we can to keep him there until help comes.

VALERIE.

Well, if he's there after all this, he's either a fool or a lunatic!

PEGGY.

Oh, mercy! Val! Oh, girls, suppose he should be a crazy man!

EDITH.

He might try to kill us all!

MABEL.

Or set fire to the house! Don't you smell smoke?
(*They all sniff expectantly.*)

PEGGY.

He might kill himself in there. Girls, do you sup-

THE BURGLAR

pose he *has* killed himself? Is that the reason he's so quiet?

EDITH.

Oh, dear!

MABEL.

Oh, Peggy!

VALERIE.

Nonsense! I don't believe he's in there at all!

FREDA.

Well, he may be. It's better not to take any chances. Val, can you shoot?

VALERIE (*retreating*).

No; at least—I haven't tried for years.

FREDA.

Edith?

EDITH (*shuddering*).

Oh, no!

FREDA (*doubtfully*).

Mabel?

MABEL.

Mercy, no! I never touched a gun!

FREDA.

Then you'll have to do it, Val. You take the shot-gun—give it to her, Peggy—and sit by the window.

COMEDIES IN MINIATURE

PEGGY.

Oh, it's not safe! If he's out there, he might shoot her!

FREDA.

No, he won't! Now, you stand there (*placing VALERIE beside a window*), so that if he leaves Mabel's room by the window you can see him, and he can't see you from the garden. That's right. And if you see him, *shoot!*

VALERIE (*proffering the gun*).

Oh, Freda, you do it!

FREDA.

Can't. I'm going to sit here and watch that door. I'm a pretty good shot. That's the reason I gave you the gun. Bird-shot scatters. Now, the rest of you may as well go to bed.

EDITH, MABEL, PEGGY.

To bed!

FREDA.

Might as well. You can't do anything here.

MABEL.

Listen! He moved then!

THE BURGLAR

VALERIE (*turning toward them*).

Nonsense! The floor creaks like that when there isn't a soul stirring!

FREDA.

Go back to your window. (*VALERIE turns back.*)

PEGGY.

Oh, girls! Are you going to keep like this all night?

FREDA.

All night—unless he comes out.

EDITH.

Let's listen and see if we can hear him breathe!

VALERIE

(*turning toward them again*).

Well, how on earth do you expect to hear one man breathe when there are five women in the room, three of them literally panting with fright!

FREDA (*sternly*).

Val, your window!

VALERIE.

Freda, do you honestly think there's any one in there?

FREDA.

Well—probably not, but then——

COMEDIES IN MINIATURE

VALERIE

(*decisively, leaving the window and putting aside her gun*).

Well, I'm not going to stand there all night straining my eyes to see a man who probably escaped half an hour ago.

MABEL (*reproachfully*).

Oh, Val!

EDITH.

Oh, don't leave us unprotected!

PEGGY (*indignantly*).

I think you might do what you can to help, Val!

FREDA.

Well—will you go in and see if the room's empty?
(EDITH, MABEL, and PEGGY *shudder*.)

VALERIE.

N-no, I'd rather not do that. But Mabel can spend the rest of the night with me, in my room.

MABEL.

I shall spend the rest of the night right here!

PEGGY.

And I!

EDITH.

And I!

THE BURGLAR

VALERIE.

That being the case, *I* shall go to bed!

FREDA.

Well—see here, Val, perhaps you are right. I'm not afraid—much. I'll go in.

PEGGY.

Oh, no, Freda, don't! (*All the girls, except VALERIE, cling protestingly to FREDA.*)

FREDA.

But somebody must take the revolver and be ready to shoot if he tries to run out.

THE OTHERS

(*precipitately backing away*).

Oh, no!

FREDA (*commandingly*).

Peggy!

PEGGY (*reluctantly*).

Well, I do know how to shoot—a little.

FREDA.

Now, listen! If the man tries to escape, shoot him! (*The girls moan.*) Val, go back to your window. (*VALERIE obeys, taking the shotgun with her.*) Girls, I—I may be taking a desperate chance! If you hear me scream, fire several shots out of the

COMEDIES IN MINIATURE

window for help, and then all come in to me together.

VALERIE.

Why not fire out of the window for help anyway?

FREDA.

Because we can't afford to waste our ammunition. We may need it. Here, Peggy. (*She hands the revolver to PEGGY, who handles it recklessly.*) Here! Don't do that! It's loaded! Now! Ready?

EDITH.

Oh, Freda, *don't* go in there!

MABEL.

If anything happens to you, I'll never forgive myself!

PEGGY.

Oh, Freda! Please, *please* don't!

FREDA (*dodging*).

Peggy! Be *careful* with that revolver! Now! I'm going! (*She goes cautiously into MABEL's room.*)

WARNING
(PEGGY *whimpers* and aims the revolver wherever her glance happens to wander. EDITH and MABEL, both sobbing, still have their agility

THE BURGLAR

somewhat taxed in their efforts to keep out of range of PEGGY's revolver, and at the same time not to turn their backs toward the dreaded doorway. A little clatter is heard in MABEL'S room. MABEL screams.)

several times EDITH *(wildly)*.

Shoot, Peggy! Shoot!

VALERIE

(springing toward PEGGY).

No! No! NO! She pushed back the curtain!

PEGGY.

Oh, that was it!

FREDA *(in MABEL'S room)*.

Oh! Why! Here he is, girls!

(MABEL shrieks and covers her face. EDITH, gasping, leans against a table, imploringly waving her arms at PEGGY, who snaps the revolver again and again, aiming it in any and all directions.)

VALERIE

(snatching the revolver from PEGGY and examining it hurriedly).

That thing's not loaded! *(She tosses it aside, lifts the shotgun and snaps it twice before she drops it.)*

Neither is that! Come, girls! *(She starts toward*

stop
COMEDIES IN MINIATURE

MABEL'S room. *Pauses suddenly, listening.*)
Why—she's laughing!

PEGGY.

Oh, she must have gone crazy!

MABEL (*screaming*).

Oh, Freda! Freda!

FREDA

(*in MABEL'S room, laughing hysterically*).

Here he is! I've got him! (*She appears in the doorway, carrying a large Maltese cat.*) Here's your burglar!

CURTAIN.

THE KLEPTOMANIAC

THE KLEPTOMANIAC

A Comedy in One Act

CHARACTERS

- Mrs. John Burton (*Peggy*).

- Mrs. Valerie Chase Armsby, a young widow.

- Mrs. Charles Dover (*Mabel*), a bride.

- Mrs. Preston Ashley (*Bertha*).

- Miss Freda Dixon.

- Miss Evelyn Evans, a journalist.

Katie, Mrs. Burton's maid.

MRS. BURTON'S boudoir is a rose-coloured apartment and is hung, strewn, and otherwise embellished with a thousand ornamental and more or less useless trifles bespeaking the superlative femininity of the occupant. A door on the right leads to the hall. Near the door is a divan, piled with soft cushions, and a tea-table, dressing-table, and desk are littered with shining appurtenances. A small table near the desk holds a desk telephone, telephone directory, memorandum pad, etc. Several comfortable chairs are conveniently placed, and books, magazines, flowers, and other evidences of refinement and culture may be observed.

PEGGY BURTON, a tall, slender, delicately impulsive woman of twenty-five, whose fair hair is more than tinged with red, and whose skin is like a rose-leaf, sits at the telephone, holding the receiver to her ear. She still wears her hat and fur coat, holding her gloves in her hand, and the details of her toilet indicate to the feminine observer that important matters are afoot.

At the tea-table, her friend, VALERIE ARMSBY, yellow-haired, brown-eyed, optimistic, calm, lounges in an easy-chair, lazily nibbling a biscuit and

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watching PEGGY. MRS. ARMSBY, *also, is in street dress.*

PEGGY

(in exasperated tone, speaking in 'phone).

Hello! . . . Hello, Central! . . . Please give me Main 6373. . . . *(Hangs up impatiently and drawls:)* "Line busy; call again." *(Rises and crosses to tea-table, where she sits to pour tea.)*

VALERIE.

Invariably! I never knew another such popular person as your husband seems to be. I have never yet been able to get him on the 'phone without waiting. What a mercy you're not jealous!

PEGGY.

I am—of his business. The woman never lived who could make Jack forget the office for an hour.

VALERIE *(lightly).*

Poor, dear Tom was just the other way. The business never existed that could make him forget for an hour the last pretty woman he had met. Heigh-ho!

PEGGY *(frankly inquisitive).*

Were you jealous?

VALERIE.

I? *(Laughs.)* Not appreciably! What's the use?

THE KLEPTOMANIAC

Besides, Tom and I were not on the turtle-dove order, you know—like Charlie and Mabel, for instance.

PEGGY (*laughing*).

Aren't they funny! Have you heard Charlie talk about his "better half"?

VALERIE.

Half! She's not a quarter! She's about a tenth in their domestic economy—and a submerged tenth at that!

PEGGY

(*goes to the 'phone, still laughing, and takes down the receiver*).

Main 6373, please. . . . Hello! Is Mr. Burton there? . . . Yes, please. . . . Oh, hello, Jack. . . . I called on Mrs. Howard, and she was out. . . . Yes. So I left a note asking them to dine with us informally to-night, at half after six. Is that right? . . . Yes. Then you'll be home early? . . . Oh, all right. Good-bye. (*Hangs up and returns to tea-table.*)

VALERIE (*lazily*).

Who's Mrs. Howard?

PEGGY

(*indifferently, playing with a biscuit*).

Oh, I don't know. I've forgotten. She's the wife of one of Jack's innumerable clients.

COMEDIES IN MINIATURE

VALERIE.

Heavens! Do you have to entertain all Jack's clients?

PEGGY (*solemnly*).

Every one, my dear, especially if they come from the provinces.

VALERIE.

What on earth do you do with them?

PEGGY.

Oh, if they have children, it's easy. I just ask how old the children are. They do the rest. Nothing entertains the average woman more than to talk as long as she likes about her offspring.

VALERIE.

And you?

PEGGY.

Oh—I look intelligent; and at stated intervals I ask questions. I have a list of them somewhere. Did you have much trouble while they were teething? Have any of them any especial talent? *That* one's good for at least three-quarters of an hour, without any further effort on my part.

VALERIE (*with amusement*).

And if they haven't children?

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PEGGY.

Then it's a case for ingenuity in finding out what they have. Sometimes it's a parrot; sometimes it's cats. Somebody ought to write a book on the adventures and hair-breadth escapes of exploring hostesses seeking common ground. Sometimes they'll talk only about church affairs. I know all the details of all the church scandals in all the small towns within five hundred miles! Sometimes (*with a grimace*) they prefer to discuss literature. My dear, there are still people living who read "The Duchess"!

VALERIE.

No!

PEGGY.

With these eyes I have seen them! I have compared notes with them.

VALERIE.

What a curious lot of clients Jack must have!

PEGGY.

Oh, they're not all like that! Bless you, no! We had a man here last week who speaks all the languages of Europe and three Chinese dialects. He makes geology his fad. He talked for two hours about moraines. Do you know what a moraine is? (*VALERIE shakes her head.*) Well, neither do I, but

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it isn't his fault, poor man! He took great pains with me.

VALERIE (*reproachfully*).

And you never told me about this! Never asked me to meet any of these people—and yet, you claim to be my friend!

PEGGY.

But I never know how it's going to turn out. Sometimes they like to look at pictures—I find Mr. Pipp a very present help in time of trouble—and sometimes they're fond of music. Then I play to them! I can imagine you sitting in the corner wearing a rapt expression while I played "Rock of Ages" with variations, and "Monastery Bells."

VALERIE.

Well, I've wondered why you kept those things in your music-cabinet.

PEGGY.

That's the reason.

VALERIE.

Peggy, I've heard of various instances of uncomplaining fortitude, but this is a kind that commands my unqualified admiration.

PEGGY (*brightly*).

Oh, don't misunderstand! It pleases Jack, so I

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enjoy it; but I don't always remember all about who's coming, you know. But just think, Val! Jack says I'm the greatest help to him in his business; so, of course, I like to do it.

VALERIE.

Naturally. Jack's glossary of the language of compliment can contain nothing stronger than that. What do you expect to-night?

PEGGY.

I don't know. That's the worst of it, I never do know. But there's some sort of a big deal on, and it's very important that this particular client—this—Mr.—er—Otis Howard—should be conciliated. Do you want to stay and see how it's done?

VALERIE.

I do.

PEGGY (*warningly*).

You may be bored.

VALERIE.

I'll take the chances.

PEGGY.

Very well (*touches bell*); on your own head be it.

Enter KATIE, a neat and youthful maid, of recent Hibernian extraction.

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PEGGY.

Mrs. Armsby will stay to dinner, Katie.

KATIE.

Be the other company comin', mum?

PEGGY.

I don't know. I haven't heard, but I think so. They always do come. You may take the wraps, Katie. (*VALERIE and PEGGY remove their hats and coats and give them to KATIE. VALERIE goes to the dressing-table to arrange her hair.*) Here are my gloves and—(*looks about*)—I wonder what I did with my purse? (*Anxiously moves articles on the table.*) I certainly had it!

VALERIE (*powdering her nose*).

Anything in it? (*KATIE lays the wraps on the divan and helps PEGGY search.*)

PEGGY.

About a hundred dollars and all my rings.

VALERIE (*turning suddenly*).

Good gracious, Peggy! Why do you carry that much money about with you? (*Rises and joins in the hunt.*)

THE KLEPTOMANIAC

PEGGY.

Jack forgot to bring me my allowance yesterday, and I expected to pay some bills this afternoon, so I went to the office and got the money. What can have become of it?

VALERIE

(turning over the papers on the desk).

Well, it's some comfort that the bills are paid!

PEGGY

(hunting among the cushions on the divan).

They're not! I went to Ethel Farquhar's recital instead—at the Van Wyke, you know. I was there to call on this Mrs.—What's-her-name?—of Jack's, and happened to remember that it was the day of Ethel's affair, so I went in. *(She turns her coat upside down and shakes it vigorously, after hurriedly searching all the pockets. All three women move about constantly, looking in every possible and impossible place for the purse.)*

VALERIE.

When did you have it last?

PEGGY.

I thought I had it when I came into the house. I must have had it, for my latch-key's in it.

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VALERIE.

But don't you remember? Katie let us in.

PEGGY.

Oh, so she did! Well, on the car——

VALERIE.

I paid the fare.

PEGGY.

That's so.

VALERIE.

Did you buy anything after you left the concert?

PEGGY.

No, it was just over when I met you, and—I didn't use my purse at all after that, did I?

VALERIE (*decidedly*).

Then you must have left it at the recital. We'll telephone down and see if it's been found. You're sure you had it when you went in?

PEGGY.

Must have had it then. I bought my ticket at the door.

VALERIE

(*searching for number in telephone directory*).

What sort of a purse was it?

THE KLEPTOMANIAC

PEGGY.

Snakeskin, bound in silver, you know, with my monogram on a little shield. (*She continues to overturn everything in the room.*)

VALERIE.

Oh, yes, I remember. (*In 'phone.*) Hello! . . . Main 325, please. . . . Hello. . . . Hello! . . . Is this the Van Wyke? . . . This is Mrs. Valerie Chase Armsby speaking. A purse containing a large sum of money and—(*to PEGGY*) rings, you said?

PEGGY (*nodding*).

All my rings. They hurt my fingers under my gloves and I took them off.

VALERIE (*in 'phone*).

And a number of valuable rings, was lost during Miss Farquhar's recital. Do you know whether it has been found? . . . It has not? . . . Oh, it's not been reported? . . . Will you make some inquiry about it, please? . . . Thank you. . . . What? . . . Snakeskin, bound in silver, with a monogram, M. G. B., on a small silver shield. The purse belongs to Mrs. John Burton. . . . Yes. Thank you. . . . And will you telephone as soon as you find out, please? . . . What's your number, Peggy?

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PEGGY.

Blue 2801.

VALERIE (*in 'phone*).

Blue, two, eight, naught, one. . . . *Eight, naught, one. . . .* That's it. Thanks. (*Hangs up receiver.*) Why on earth don't you pay your bills by check, Peggy?

PEGGY.

Oh, I don't know. It's so much trouble. (*The door-bell is heard. KATIE goes out.*) And then—I like to handle the money somehow. (*Gazes reproachfully at 'phone.*) Oh, why doesn't that Van Wyke man answer?

VALERIE.

My dear girl! It takes half an hour to get a response to a card at the Van Wyke when you're on the spot. What can you expect when you telephone?

Enter KATIE.

KATIE.

Miss Dixon.

Enter FREDA DIXON, a tall, brown-haired, breezy, self-reliant young woman of twenty-four, in street dress, wearing a fur coat similar to PEGGY's.

THE KLEPTOMANIAC

PEGGY

(*meeting FREDA with both hands extended*).

Oh, Freda, what do you think has happened?

FREDA (*nodding to VALERIE*).

Couldn't imagine. What have you lost now?

PEGGY (*resentfully*).

What makes you think I've lost anything?

FREDA (*pulling off her gloves*).

That's the usual thing, isn't it? You left your boa at Grace's tea, your best Sunday handkerchief at my luncheon, your umbrella on the train, and your purse under a pile of chiffons at Mayberry's, all within a week. What is it now?

PEGGY.

Freda! You needn't be disagreeable about it, anyway!

FREDA (*breezily*).

I'm not disagreeable about it, my dear. Quite the contrary! Your delightful in consequence (*taking off her coat*) is one of your most charming traits, and if you failed to telephone down to me to pick up your belongings after an affair at my house, I'd be as disappointed as if—as if the sun overslept and failed to get up on time!

(*KATIE picks up all the wraps and goes out.*)

COMEDIES IN MINIATURE

VALERIE.

Much you know about whether the sun's up on time or not!

FREDA

(*sitting at the dressing-table to arrange her hair*).

You see, you furnish entertainment and amusement for us. You're invaluable as a discourager of *ennui*. (*She turns toward PEGGY, grandiloquently gesticulating with the hand-mirror.*) When everything else fails, when the fickle pleasures of society pall upon us, when friendship fails and love grows cold, when everything turns to ashes except the sawdust stuffing of our dollies, and that leaks out and litters up the carpets, you come to the rescue! There's always something that you have lost, and in the search for your elusive possessions—the most fascinating pursuit known to man—the vanishing zest returns to us, and life seems again a golden bubble, created for our amusement. Why, Peggy dear (*rising, with a sudden return to her natural manner*), you're a benefactor to the human race! No family should be without you. I suggest that you copyright yourself and charge a royalty for the privilege of joining in the chase of your wandering belongings.

VALERIE (*drily*).

Well, I suggest that you stem the torrent of your

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eloquence and get down on your knees and look under the divan for Peggy's purse. Anybody would know your father was a preacher! What a pity (*laughing*) that only his vocabulary descended to you!

FREDA

(*obediently getting on her knees to look under the divan*).

Oh, it's the purse again, is it? Have you tried Mayberry's?

PEGGY.

No, I haven't been there. You see, I went to Ethel Farquhar's recital at the Van Wyke, and—*girls!* I believe my pocket was picked!

FREDA (*still on her knees*).

Anything in it except samples?

PEGGY.

Yes, a hundred dollars and all my rings.

FREDA

(*suddenly subsiding into a heap on the floor*).

Ye gods!

PEGGY (*excitedly*).

And there was a woman sitting next me—a sort of elaborate person, you know—and when my coat fell down she picked it up——

COMEDIES IN MINIATURE

VALERIE.

Fell down where?

PEGGY.

Slid off my lap, you know—she picked it up, and I noticed that she was very awkward about it—fussed and fumbled a whole lot, you know, but it never occurred to me that she was picking my pocket!

FREDA (*joining PEGGY and VALERIE*).

What sort of a woman was she?

PEGGY.

She had on an elegant brown tailor suit, made with a seven-gored skirt, and a jacket trimmed with appliqué, opening over a cream-coloured wool waist; a brown hat, trimmed with folds of panne velvet, with a very little gold on it, and brown gloves. Her hair was yellow.

VALERIE.

Plated?

PEGGY.

N-no, I rather think it was genuine. And she had a lovely complexion.

FREDA.

Doesn't sound bad.

VALERIE.

How old was she?

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PEGGY.

Thirty-five, perhaps.

VALERIE.

Tall?

PEGGY.

Yes, and slender—a beautiful figure.

FREDA.

In fact, very attractive.

PEGGY.

Yes, she was attractive. I wondered who she was.

VALERIE.

Alone?

PEGGY.

No, she had some one with her. They seemed, from their conversation, to be staying in the hotel. (*The telephone bell rings and PEGGY goes to the 'phone.*) Hello. . . . Yes. . . . Oh, the Van Wyke! Did you find it? . . . (*Anxious lines appear in her face.*) Have you made a very careful search? Oh, girls, they can't find it! (*She sinks back in her chair and VALERIE goes quickly to the 'phone, taking the receiver from PEGGY's relaxed fingers.*)

VALERIE (*in 'phone*).

You're certain it wasn't found? . . . The em-

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ployees are entirely trustworthy? . . . Yes. Thank you. Good-bye. (*Hangs up.*) Well, now what are we going to do?

PEGGY (*tearfully*).

I wouldn't mind the money so much—though that's bad enough!—but my rings! My—my engagement ring, too! (*Sobs.*) How can I ever tell Jack!

FREDA (*sitting at the tea-table*).

Oh, now don't give up, Peggy! We've not exhausted "the bright lexicon of youth" yet. Have you looked in your coat?

PEGGY.

Yes, in every pocket. I held it upside down and shook it! (*The door-bell rings.*)

FREDA.

And you haven't any pocket in your gown?

PEGGY (*indignantly*).

Good gracious, no! Do I look like a woman who'd wear a gown it was possible to put a pocket in? (*She weeps disconsolately, and the others look in all sorts of absurd places for the purse.*)

FREDA.

Well, suppose the woman did take it? What then?

THE KLEPTOMANIAC

VALERIE (*uncertainly*).

I suppose we might trace her. Shall we report it to the police?

Enter KATIE.

KATIE.

Mrs. Dover.

VALERIE.

Here comes the submerged tenth!

Enter MABEL DOVER, a small, dark, smiling, impetuous young woman, from whose modish raiment an occasional belated grain of rice still exudes.

MABEL (*radiantly*).

Oh, girls, how jolly to find you all here! Why, Peggy, what's the matter?

PEGGY

(*with a fresh burst of tears*).

I—I've lost m-m-my rings!

MABEL.

Your rings! Were they stolen?

PEGGY.

N-no—at least—I don't know.

VALERIE.

She put her rings in her purse——

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PEGGY.

Be-because they hurt my fingers under my gloves——

FREDA.

And then she lost her purse at Ethel's recital.

PEGGY.

That is, I *think* I lost it.

FREDA.

There was a woman sitting next her——

PEGGY.

A very *queer* sort of woman!

VALERIE.

Who picked up her purse when she dropped it, and she thinks——

PEGGY.

I'm *sure* she picked my pocket!

MABEL.

How awful!

FREDA (*doubtfully*).

She seems to have been a very well-dressed sort of woman.

MABEL (*shaking her head*).

Charlie says that sometimes the most desperate

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criminals are very well groomed—gamblers, and that sort of thing, you know.

VALERIE (*thoughtfully*).

Yes, I suppose that's so. Perhaps we'd better report it to the police.

MABEL.

Charlie says that the police rarely accomplish much in matters of this sort.

FREDA.

Well, it's all we can do, it seems to me.

MABEL.

Charlie says that if we were robbed, he'd rather undertake the recovery of the things himself than trust to the police. They're so slow and so stupid!

VALERIE (*with spirit*).

Well, Mabel, we can't very well start out in pursuit of Peggy's purse, can we?

MABEL.

N-no, I suppose not. But I'll tell Charlie to keep a sharp look-out in the shops—what is it they call them? Hedges?

FREDA (*concealing a smile*).

You mean fences.

COMEDIES IN MINIATURE

MABEL.

Yes, that's it! Fences—and maybe he can identify Peggy's rings. (PEGGY *bursts into tears and drops into a chair.*)

FREDA.

Yes, but even Charlie would have difficulty in identifying Peggy's money.

MABEL.

Money! Was there money, too?

PEGGY.

Y-y-yes, a—a hundred dollars!

MABEL.

Why, Peggy Burton! I never carry so much money about with me. Charlie says it's so foolish, for women are always losing things.

PEGGY.

I don't care so much about the money. I can make that up somehow; b-b-but my rings—o-o-oh, my rings!

FREDA (*soothingly, joining her*).

Why, Peggy, dear, Jack would buy you a dozen rings rather than have you grieve over them this way.

THE KLEPTOMANIAC

PEGGY (*sobbing unrestrainedly*).

Y-yes, I know! That's the worst of it! But th-th-they'd never be *those* rings. I can never have another enga-a-agement ring! And how—*how* can I tell Jack!

FREDA.

If we succeed in finding the purse, there will be no necessity of bothering Jack about it at all.

PEGGY (*a little more hopefully*).

Yes, that's so.

MABEL (*disapprovingly*).

Why, Peggy! Would you have secrets from Jack? Charlie says that a woman's first secret from her husband is her first step toward unfaithfulness.

VALERIE.

Ergo, every time the laundry fails to send home a sheet, hubby must hear of it! I suppose he says, also, that a considerate husband never distresses his wife with the troubles incident to a man's large affairs?

MABEL (*innocently*).

Why, yes! How did you know?

VALERIE (*drily*).

Oh, I'm psychic, and—I just know things. Besides, I had a husband once.

COMEDIES IN MINIATURE

MABEL.

Was he like that?

VALERIE.

Yes—in the early stages.

MABEL (*hesitatingly*).

Do—do you mean that he—changed?

VALERIE.

Well, he progressed ; graduated, as it were.

MABEL.

You mean that he got so he didn't—*care*?

VALERIE.

About the sheets? Not in the least! But he cared very much not to be bothered.

MABEL (*sympathetically*).

Poor Val! It must be so hard when it's like that! Now, Charlie says that it's the sharing of all the dear little details that makes married life so sweet.

VALERIE.

That is, all *your* dear little details. Of course, *his* are—are——

MABEL (*eagerly*).

Yes, that's it! His are—are—well, you know, a man's business is—is——

THE KLEPTOMANIAC

VALERIE (*lightly*).

Oh, well, Charlie's in the primary department. There are several grades ahead of him yet.

MABEL (*earnestly*).

Oh, no, you don't understand, Val! Charlie will never change.

FREDA.

Well, I don't see that Charlie's constancy is going to help us find Peggy's purse. The question before the house is, what next?

MABEL.

Don't you think we'd better tell Jack, Peggy?

FREDA.

Not until we've exhausted our own resources. That's the trouble with women. They're always flying to a man for relief, without testing their own powers at all. I think we'd better notify the police.

VALERIE.

Consistent Freda? *She* wouldn't fly to a man for relief!

FREDA.

My dear girl, the Police Department is not a man; it's an institution, and one of our legitimate re-

COMEDIES IN MINIATURE

sources. I'm going to call them up. (*She goes to the telephone and takes up the directory.*)

PEGGY (*with a fresh outburst of sobs*).
Oh, no, no, no! Don't, Freda! Don't!

VALERIE, FREDA, MABEL.
Why not?

VALERIE.
Don't you want them notified, Peggy?

PEGGY.
Oh, no! It seems so—so public, you know!

FREDA
(*hunting in the directory for a number*).
But if the woman stole your purse——

VALERIE.
And your money——

FREDA.
And your rings——

PEGGY.
Oh—well—go on! (*Dolefully.*) I suppose it's the only way, but (*shuddering*)—it seems horrible! (*MABEL dubiously shakes her head.*)

THE KLEPTOMANIAC

FREDA

(running her finger down the page).

C, e, . . . c, i, . . . c, h,—here it is!
(In 'phone.) Main 65, please. . . . Yes.
. . . Hello. Is that the Chief of Police?
. . . I want to report the loss of a purse belonging to Mrs. John Burton at Miss Farquhar's recital at the Van Wyke this afternoon. . . . We *have* made inquiries, and it has not been found. . . . A very suspicious-looking woman sat next Mrs. Burton, and we think she may have picked the pocket of Mrs. Burton's coat. . . . No, this is Miss Freda Dixon speaking. . . . Yes. . . . Very well. Peggy, he wants to talk to you.

PEGGY

(backing away to the opposite side of the room).
Oh, no! I can't talk to him!

VALERIE.

Nonsense, Peggy! Don't be a goose! He's only a man, and he's two miles away! *(PEGGY is pushed to the 'phone, where she reluctantly takes the receiver.)*

PEGGY *(timidly, in 'phone).*

Hello. . . . Hello *(sob.)* . . . Hello!
. . . HELLO! . . . Yes! . . . *(sob.)*
This is Mrs. Burton. . . . Yes. . . . No, but I think she was staying at the Van Wyke.

COMEDIES IN MINIATURE

. . . Well, I dropped my coat, you know, and she picked it up, and she was very slow and awkward about it, but it didn't occur to me, at the time, that she was picking my pocket. . . . Yes, a hundred dollars and all my rings (*sob*), and one of them w-w-was my engagement ring. (FREDA *makes a restraining gesture*.) . . . Five. I took them off and put them in my purse, you know, because—what? . . . Snakeskin, bound in silver, with my monogram, M. G. B., on a small silver shield. . . . Well, she was a very queer-looking person. . . . Very elaborately dressed. . . . She had on a brown tailor gown (*rapidly*), made with a ^{seven}gored skirt, and a jacket with appliqué trimmings, opening over a vest of—what? . . . Well, but I want to tell you how she was dressed. . . . Brown suit, yes. . . . What? . . . Yes, a brown hat, trimmed with folds of panne velvet and a gold—what? . . . Blond. Her hair was quite yellow. (*She continues nodding and replying to questions over the 'phone.*)

MABEL

(*complacently patting her own dark locks*).

Charlie says he never quite trusts a woman with yellow hair.

THE KLEPTOMANIAC

VALERIE (*the golden-haired*).

Really?

MABEL.

Oh, I *beg* your pardon, Val! I didn't think! Of course, Charlie didn't mean—that is, he wouldn't think of saying anything like that about any one he knew, you know!

VALERIE (*good-naturedly*).

Oh, we all know that Charlie's never looked at any one of us long enough to know what colour our hair is. (MABEL *smiles complacently*.)

PEGGY (*in 'phone*).

And if you find her—oh, you won't arrest her, will you?

FREDA.

Why, you goose, of course they'll arrest her!

PEGGY (*in 'phone*).

Oh, no, I—I——

FREDA.

You want your rings, don't you, Peggy?

PEGGY (*in 'phone*).

I just want my rings, you know.

VALERIE.

Don't you want your money?

COMEDIES IN MINIATURE

PEGGY (*in 'phone*).

And my money.

FREDA.

Peggy, don't you interfere with the Police Department. You let them go ahead their own way.

PEGGY (*to her*).

But it's so awful! Think of being arrested! (*In 'phone.*) What? . . . Oh, well—very well. I (*sob*)—I *must* have my rings. You'll get my engagement ring for me, anyway, won't you? . . . Yes. Good-bye. (*Hangs up slowly.*) Oh, girls, isn't this awful!

VALERIE

(*joining PEGGY at 'phone*).

Now, I think we ought to tell the hotel people about it.

MABEL (*across the room*).

Well, *I* think you ought to tell your *husband*!

PEGGY

(*doubtfully, to VALERIE, ignoring MABEL*).
Oh, do you?

VALERIE.

Yes, for if they have a pickpocket among their guests, they ought to know it.

FREDA.

That's so.

THE KLEPTOMANIAC

PEGGY.

Yes, I suppose that is so.

FREDA (*significantly*).

You tell them, then, Val.

PEGGY (*quickly*).

No, I'll tell them. (VALERIE and FREDA exchange glances of amused exasperation. PEGGY takes receiver.) Main 325, please. . . . Hello. Van Wyke?

VALERIE.

Ask for Mr. Collins, the clerk.

PEGGY.

I'd like to speak to Mr. Collins, please. . . . Hello. Mr. Collins? . . . This is Mrs. John Burton speaking. I—I have very unpleasant news for you, Mr. Collins.

FREDA.

Oh, good gracious, Peggy, don't try to break it to him gently!

(*During the ensuing speech FREDA and VALERIE, by frowns and smiles and little quick, impatient gestures, indicate their mingled amusement and irritation.*)

COMEDIES IN MINIATURE

PEGGY (*in 'phone*).

My pocket was picked at Miss Farquhar's recital this afternoon, and I lost my purse and a hundred dollars and all my rings. One of them was my engagement ring, you know. I took them off and put them in my purse because—what? . . . Thank you. But that's not all. It was done by a woman who is staying in the hotel. . . . Yes. She sat next me, and picked up my coat when I dropped it, you know, and she was very slow and awkward about it (*with mechanical rapidity*), but it didn't occur to me at the time that she was picking my pocket. . . . Yes, I'm quite sure, for she said something to her friend about going up to her room before they went out. . . . No (*impatiently*), I don't know who she was, of course, but she wore a brown tailor suit, made with a ^{Archel}seven-gored skirt, and a jacket with appliqué trimmings, opening over a—what? . . . She was tall and slender, with yellow hair—suspiciously yellow hair!—and she wore a brown hat trimmed with folds of panne vel—what? . . . Oh, I assure you there can be no mistake. I have looked everywhere for the purse and it's not to be found. I haven't had it since I left the recital hall. (*To the girls.*) The idea! As if I'd take all this trouble unless I knew! (*In 'phone, with dignity.*) And I hope you'll take steps to recover my property for me, Mr. Collins.

THE KLEPTOMANIAC

. . . Yes. Thank you. I thought you'd be glad to know, for the protection of your other guests, that you had a desperate character in the house.

. . . Yes. Good-bye. (*Hangs up.*) He says he'll make some inquiries and find out whether any one answering that description is staying there.

Enter KATIE.

KATIE.

There's a lady below, Mrs. Burton, sayin' she's a dæ.e wid ye. Miss Evans, she is.

PEGGY.

Miss Evans? Miss Evans!

FREDA.

Oh, she's the reporter for the *Top Crest*, don't you remember? You promised to tell her about the favours and things for the cotillion to-morrow night.

PEGGY.

Oh, so I did! What shall I do?

VALERIE.

Let her come up. We'll all tell her, and it will kill time until we hear something about the purse.

COMEDIES IN MINIATURE

PEGGY.

Bring Miss Evans up here, Katie. (*Exit KATIE.*)

PEGGY.

Oh, girls, do you suppose that horrid policeman will find my rings?

MABEL.

Charlie says he never knew a policeman to find anything he was looking for, or to be anywhere he was wanted.

PEGGY.

How soon do you think we might hear?

FREDA.

Oh, it may be several hours.

PEGGY.

Hours! Why, Jack will be home—what time is it?—Jack may be home any minute now, and—oh, dear, girls, how can I ever face him? Oh, I can't wait hours! I'll just call up that Chief of Police and tell him he must find that purse within half an hour, or I'll——

Enter MISS EVANS, a small, brisk, inquisitive person, behind whose round black eyes a panoramic lens is in constant operation.

THE KLEPTOMANIAC

PEGGY (*vaguely*).

Oh, how do you do, Miss Evans? Miss Evans (*introducing*), Mrs. Armsby, Mrs. Dover, Miss Dixon.

Enter KATIE, *with a note*.

KATIE.

Here's a note that's just come for ye, mum. A boy from the Van Wyke brought it. (*Hands note to PEGGY and goes out.*)

PEGGY, VALERIE, FRED A, MABEL.

From the Van Wyke!

PEGGY.

Oh, girls, do you suppose they've found it?

(*The girls all crowd together, looking at the note over PEGGY's shoulder, leaving MISS EVANS a keen and unnoticed observer of the scene.*)

MABEL.

Perhaps they want you to come down there and identify the woman.

PEGGY.

Oh, I couldn't! Oh, girls, do you suppose they'll make me do that?

VALERIE.

Perhaps it's only the purse they want you to identify.

COMEDIES IN MINIATURE

PEGGY (*reading*).

“My dear Mrs. Burton: I am very sorry to have missed——” what under the sun! (*She glances at the signature.*) “Elizabeth Deane Howard!” Oh, it isn’t from the hotel people at all! It’s from Jack’s woman!

MABEL.

Jack’s woman!

VALERIE.

Mrs. Otis Howard!

PEGGY.

And I was so happy. I was so sure it had been found! (*She plaintively wipes her eyes.*)

VALERIE.

What does she say?

PEGGY.

Oh, I don’t know! Read it.

VALERIE

(*glancing over the letter*).

Sorry to have missed your call. So kind of you to ask them to dinner. Accept with pleasure (PEGGY *groans*). And as the men are coming directly from the office, she will adopt Mr. Burton’s suggestion and come rather early, and—she’s yours very cordially.

THE KLEPTOMANIAC

PEGGY.

Oh, how can I talk to stupid old clients when I'm in such trouble!

MISS EVANS (*to VALERIE*).

Mrs. Burton has met with a loss?

PEGGY (*sobbing*).

Oh, yes, a great loss! (*FREDA frowns warningly at her.*) My pocket was picked this afternoon at Miss Farquhar's recital, and she took my purse and my money and all my rings.

MISS EVANS.

Your rings!

PEGGY.

Yes, I took them off, you know, because they hurt my fingers under my gloves, and put them in my purse. And one of them was my engagement ring! (*She weeps.*)

MISS EVANS.

Has she any idea who took it?

FREDA (*evasively*).

Well, one never can be sure, you know.

MABEL (*eagerly*).

Oh, yes, there was a dreadful woman sitting next her——

COMEDIES IN MINIATURE

PEGGY.

And she picked up my coat when I dropped it——
(*FREDA tries by frowns and signals to stop them.*)

VALERIE.

And of course it's quite possible that she——

MISS EVANS.

What sort of a woman was she?

MABEL.

Oh, a very showy sort of woman——

PEGGY.

With yellow hair——

VALERIE.

And a brown suit——

PEGGY.

Made with a seven-gored skirt——

MABEL.

And a jacket trimmed with appliqué——

PEGGY.

Opening over a vest of cream-coloured——

MABEL.

And a brown hat——

THE KLEPTOMANIAC

PEGGY.

Trimmed with folds of panne velvet——

FREDA (*with decision*).

Miss Evans is a very busy woman, girls, and she came up here to learn about the cotillion.

MISS EVANS.

Oh, I assure you, I'm very much interested. And she sat next you, you say?

PEGGY.

And she's evidently a guest in the hotel, because——

MABEL.

And we've notified the hotel people to keep an eye on her——

VALERIE.

Because, you know she might make them a great deal of trouble.

PEGGY.

And the police are looking for her; and oh, Miss Evans, do you think they'll find my rings?

MISS EVANS.

I think it's very likely.

MABEL.

Charlie—my husband—says that the police are

COMEDIES IN MINIATURE

very slow and stupid, and that unless one has what he calls a "pull"—

PEGGY.

Oh, I wish I had a pull! Miss Evans, do you know any one who has a pull?

MISS EVANS.

Sometimes we newspaper people are able to accomplish things that baffle the police, Mrs. Burton. I'll see what I can do for you.

PEGGY.

Will you? Oh, thank you, Miss Evans!

FREDA

(*stepping between PEGGY and the reporter, with an authoritative manner*).

I don't think we need to trouble Miss Evans, Peggy. She is, as I have said, a very busy woman, and we ought not to ask her to go outside the line of her regular duties; and, of course (*significantly*), this matter can be of no possible use to Miss Evans professionally. (MISS EVANS *puts the suggestion aside with a gesture.*)

PEGGY.

Well, I'm sure, Freda, it's very kind of Miss Evans to offer to help me. If you'd lost your rings—

THE KLEPTOMANIAC

only you haven't an engagement ring—you'd appreciate people who really offered to do something, instead of just standing around waiting!

FREDA (*calmly*).

And in the meantime Miss Evans is standing around waiting to see the cotillion favours.

PEGGY.

Oh, that's true. They're in the chiffonier in the guest-room. We'll go and see them. Will you come this way, Miss Evans?

(*Exeunt all except MABEL, who lingers. When the others are gone, she hurries to the telephone, radiant with anticipatory smiles.*)

MABEL (*in 'phone*).

Main 781. . . . Hello. That you, dearest?
. . . . Oh, I *beg* your pardon! Is my husband
there? . . . Mrs. Dover, yes. . . . Thank
you. . . . Oh, hello, darling. How do you feel,
dear? . . . That's good. . . . Yes, I'm all
right, only we're in such a lot of trouble. . . .
What? . . . Oh, no, Peggy, I mean. . . .
Yes, I'm at Peggy's, and oh, Charlie, dear, such
a dreadful thing has happened! . . . Well

COMEDIES IN MINIATURE

(*settling herself for a long talk*), Peggy went to Ethel Farquhar's recital at the Van Wyke this afternoon, and a dreadful woman who sat next her stole her pocketbook and all her rings, and, oh, Charlie, one of them was her engagement ring! And there was a hundred dollars in her purse! . . . That's what I told her. So foolish! And poor Peggy has been crying all the afternoon, and she's going to have company to dinner, and oh, it's awful! . . . Why, she dropped her coat and the woman picked it up for her, and she knows she must have taken it, for she hasn't had it since, and it was in her coat-pocket. Besides, the woman was a horrid sort of person, with bleached hair, you know, and all that. And, oh, Charlie, dear, can't you do something? . . . Peggy doesn't *want* to tell Jack. . . . I know. We wouldn't feel that way about it, would we, darling? Your wife would go to you first, wouldn't she? . . . Well, you might go to the hotel and see if you can find the woman. She's staying at the Van Wyke. . . . Peggy heard her say so. . . . They've notified the police. . . . Yes, I told them you said that, but they went right ahead, just the same. And the clerk of the hotel has been told. But I want you to go right up to the Van Wyke and find out who this woman is, and see her yourself. I know *you* can make her give up the purse and the rings

THE KLEPTOMANIAC

and things, and poor Peggy's so unhappy about it.
. . . What? . . . Well, she's tall and slender,
and wears a brown tailor suit, made with a—what?
. . . Oh, all right. . . . Ready? . . .
Tall and slender—got that? . . . And
bleached hair. . . . And she wears a brown
tailor suit, made with a seven-gored-skirt. . . .
What? . . . A seven-gored-skirt. . . .
Yes; and a jacket trimmed with appliqué . . .
Appliqué . . . A, p, p, l, i, q, u, é. . . .
Oh, it's trimming, cut out and then sewed on, you
know. . . . No, not ruffled. Sewed on flat
—a sort of passementerie. You know what pas-
sementerie is, don't you, dear? . . . Oh, well,
never mind. It's trimmed, you know, not plain
like mine. . . . And a brown hat—got that?
. . . Trimmed with folds of panne velvet. . . .
Panne. . . . P, a, double n, e. . . . Why,
it's—it's—oh, never mind! Just put down a brown
hat. And when you find her, you'll just *talk* to her,
won't you, dear? . . . Oh, thank you so much! I
won't tell Peggy that I asked you. I'll let you sur-
prise her! She'll be so happy! . . . Oh, you
dear! I'm *always* happy since I have you! . . .
Yes. Good-bye, dear.— Oh, Charlie! . . . Be
home pretty soon? . . . Oh, of course! Well,
as soon as you get the rings and things you'll
'phone me, won't you? . . . No, Peggy's going

COMEDIES IN MINIATURE

to have guests for dinner, so I won't stay here and wait for you. . . . Yes. Good-bye, darling! *There!*

(Hangs up, sighing contentedly, rises and goes to dressing-table, as PEGGY, MISS EVANS, FREDa, and VALERIE enter, all talking at once.)

PEGGY.

Yes, they're quite the prettiest favours of the season.

VALERIE.

Oh, Mabel, why didn't you come?

MISS EVANS

(glancing at her notes).

Thank you very much, Mrs. Burton. I think I have everything now.

Enter KATIE with a card, which she gives to PEGGY.

PEGGY *(in tones of apprehension).*

Mrs. Preston Ashley! *(Turns to MABEL.)*

VALERIE.

Good gracious! *(MISS EVANS grows more alert.)*

FREDA *(distinctly).*

Yes, I think that's everything, Miss Evans. Sorry we detained you so long. Good afternoon. Miss Evans is going, Peggy.

THE KLEPTOMANIAC

PEGGY

(perfunctorily, in the midst of an excited conference with MABEL).

Oh, good afternoon, Miss Evans.

(MISS EVANS, having no recourse, makes reluctant adieux and departs, followed by KATIE.)

PEGGY.

What on earth shall I do? Anybody can see that I've been crying!

FREDA.

Send down word you're not at home.

PEGGY.

I don't dare. She'll see Miss Evans going out, and she'd never forgive me.

VALERIE.

Then have her come up here. We'll do what we can to protect you.

Enter KATIE.

PEGGY.

Well—bring her up here, Katie. *(Exit KATIE.)*

FREDA.

Now, listen to me, girls. Not one word of this

COMEDIES IN MINIATURE

business to Bertha Ashley. She'd spread it broadcast.

VALERIE.

Heavens, no! Not a whisper!

FREDA.

Though it doesn't make much difference who knows it, now that Evelyn Evans has her talons in it.

PEGGY.

I think you were horrid to Miss Evans, Freda. She was so kind about offering to find my rings!

FREDA.

I wonder how you'll like it when the whole story appears in the *Top Crest*, with your picture, and the woman's—if they find her—and all our names, and everything?

PEGGY.

Oh, she wouldn't publish it!

FREDA.

Oh, wouldn't she! This is just to her taste! Don't you know about her? She's the woman who wormed the whole story of the Custis boys' quarrel out of Johnny Custis's wife, in confidence, and then wrote it up, with embellishments, for the *Top Crest*. (*Chorus of ejaculations.*) She's the woman who

THE KLEPTOMANIAC

furnished the first report of the Eaton scandal, and started all that horrid notoriety for Marian Doubleday.

VALERIE.

How do you know?

FREDA.

My cousin, Harry Summers, is a newspaper man, and they all know who did it.

PEGGY (*indignantly*).

Well, why didn't you tell me?

FREDA (*with spirit*).

Well! I did what I could, didn't I? You wouldn't take a hint, and I couldn't *make* you stop. It's your affair, not mine, and if you choose to publish it through the medium of the *Top Crest*, you have the privilege.

VALERIE (*easily*).

Oh, I don't believe she'll use it, anyway. She can't afford to incur our displeasure.

FREDA.

A lot she'd care for our displeasure if she got a good story out of it! (PEGGY *begins to whimper again.*)

Enter BERTHA ASHLEY, a tall, thin-lipped woman,

COMEDIES IN MINIATURE

who, by tone, bearing, and costume, seeks to give the impression that she moves in exclusive circles.

VALERIE

(intercepting her near the door).

Oh, how do you do, Bertha? Such a long time since I've seen you!

BERTHA

Yes, isn't it? *(Shakes hands and passes on. VALERIE signs to MABEL to make talk.)*

FREDA

(stopping BERTHA at the tea-table).

Why, Bertha, how did you happen to come, too? Did you suspect a gathering of the clans?

BERTHA

(coolly, stepping past her toward PEGGY).

Ah, Freda, you, too?

MABEL *(joining BERTHA).*

Oh, Bertha, I want to tell you! Charlie saw you on the train the other day, and he said——

BERTHA

(passing her and looking shrewdly at PEGGY).

Well, Peggy, how did you enjoy the recital?

PEGGY *(whose lips still quiver).*

Oh, were you there? I—I——

THE KLEPTOMANIAC

FREDA .

(slipping between BERTHA and PEGGY).

Oh, yes, she enjoyed it immensely! She's just been telling us about it.

BERTHA *(with a sharp glance).*

You look as if it had affected your emotions.

PEGGY.

Oh, no, I—I——

VALERIE *(pouring tea).*

Do sit down, Bertha! Doesn't Ethel's voice always affect you? It has a pathetic quality that never fails to bring tears to my eyes.

BERTHA *(sitting at tea-table).*

H'm. Perhaps. I'm not especially sensitive to that sort of thing.

VALERIE.

Do have some tea, Bertha.

BERTHA.

No, thanks. You were in very distinguished company, Peggy. (FREDA and VALERIE offer her biscuits and sweets, which she waves away.)

COMEDIES IN MINIATURE

PEGGY.

I was?

BERTHA (*pulling off her gloves*).

Yes, weren't you with Mrs. Howard?

PEGGY.

Mrs. Howard!

BERTHA.

Yes, Mrs. Otis Howard, you know. Is it possible you *didn't* know that the woman who sat next you was Mrs. Otis Howard?

PEGGY, VALERIE, FREDA, MABEL.

Mrs. Otis Howard!

BERTHA.

Yes, didn't you notice her? She wore a brown tailor suit——

PEGGY.

With a seven-^{*tube*}-gored skirt——

FREDA.

And a jacket trimmed with appliqué——

MABEL.

Opening over a vest of——

VALERIE.

And a brown hat——

THE KLEPTOMANIAC

PEGGY.

Trimmed with folds of panne——

VALERIE.

And she's tall——

MABEL.

And slender——

PEGGY.

And has yellow hair——

BERTHA.

Well, you all seem to know all about her!

PEGGY.

Was that Mrs. Otis Howard?

BERTHA (*rising*).

That was Mrs. Otis Howard.

PEGGY (*wildly*).

And she's the wife of Jack's client! And she's coming here to dinner! And—oh, girls (*wailing*), what have I done! (*She drops into a chair weeping aloud.*)

BERTHA.

Why, what's the matter? (*FREDA goes to PEGGY and vigorously remonstrates with her.*)

COMEDIES IN MINIATURE

VALERIE

(*stepping between BERTHA and PEGGY, talking rapidly and impressively*).

Why, you see, this Mrs. Howard is the wife of a very important client of Jack's, and Peggy called on her to-day and she was out. Peggy wants to show this Mrs. Howard every possible courtesy, you know, and she didn't recognise her—how could she, you know, when she hadn't met her?—and—and——
——er——

BERTHA.

Well, I don't see anything to cry about.

PEGGY.

Oh, you don't know! You don't know! I've lost——

FREDA

(*giving PEGGY a little restraining shake*).

Peggy's lost—has lost—her *kitten*! Viking, you know. He strayed away——

PEGGY (*moaning*).

I'm sure she stole it!

FREDA.

Or been stolen—and she's quite broken-hearted about it, as you can see. We've been trying to comfort her and tell her that he may be found again, or come back—cats always do come back, don't they?

THE KLEPTOMANIAC

PEGGY (*sobbing*).

And to think that it was Mrs. Howard, of all people!

MABEL.

How do you know it was Mrs. Howard, Bertha?

BERTHA.

Why, I know all about her. She was one of the Philadelphia Deanes, you know, and she was engaged to Count Angellotti, but it was broken off very suddenly. Then about four years ago she married Otis Howard. He's a cousin of the Van Vliets, you know—the New York Van Vliets—and they have the loveliest place in Willowdale! We spent the summer there once, and I met her at a luncheon at Mrs. Bolton's—Mrs. Sumner Bolton's, you know. She was a Felton.

FREDA.

Tell me about this Mrs. Howard, Bertha. Is she—peculiar in any way?

BERTHA.

Why, no! Why should she be? Only she's very smart, you know; exclusive and all that. (PEGGY *groans*. FREDA *motions to MABEL to take BERTHA away*.) It's considered a great distinction in Willowdale to be invited to her house. And she's coming here to dinner, you say?

COMEDIES IN MINIATURE

MABEL.

Yes, and we must go and give Peggy a chance to dress. Come on, Bertha. Good-bye, Peggy. Don't worry about Viking. Come, Bertha.

BERTHA.

Aren't the rest coming?

FREDA.

Oh, yes, we'll catch you before you get to the corner.

BERTHA.

I was sure I saw you talking to her, Peggy. She certainly smiled and nodded at you.

PEGGY.

I dropped my coat and she picked it up for me, and I thought——

FREDA (*hurriedly*).

It is customary to thank people for courtesies of that sort, Bertha, even if one isn't aware of their exalted social position.

BERTHA.

How long is Mrs. Howard going to stay, Peggy?

THE KLEPTOMANIAC

VALERIE.

She doesn't know. She hasn't seen her yet, you know.

BERTHA.

Are you going to give a luncheon or anything for her?

FREDA

(*handing BERTHA her gloves*).

How can she tell, when she doesn't know how long she's going to stay?

BERTHA.

Well, if I can help you any, you'll be sure to let me know, won't you, dear? You may have any of my things, you know.

MABEL.

Oh, come on, Bertha!

VALERIE and FREDA.

Good-bye, Bertha! Good-bye! (*Exeunt BERTHA and MABEL, FREDA hurrying them out.*)

FREDA

(*turning back with a grimace*).

That woman would beg for an invitation to meet the devil, if she thought he was in any way connected with the Knickerbocker aristocracy! Well, what now? Who is this Mrs. Howard, anyway?

COMEDIES IN MINIATURE

PEGGY

(springing up and pacing the floor).

She's the wife of a client of Jack's.

VALERIE *(drily)*.

And it's most important that she should be conciliated!

PEGGY.

Oh, what shall I do! What will Jack say? There's some sort of a big deal on, and it means thousands of dollars to him——

FREDA.

For heaven's sake! *(Runs to 'phone and seizes directory.)*

VALERIE.

What are you going to do, Freda?

FREDA.

Stop the police.

PEGGY.

Oh, can you, Freda? Can you stop them?

FREDA.

Well, I can try.

VALERIE.

It's quite possible, I suppose, that the woman's a kleptomaniac.

THE KLEPTOMANIAC

PEGGY

(fingering the silver on the tea-table).

Mercy! And she's coming here to dinner!

FREDA.

I wonder if she is?

PEGGY.

Eh?

FREDA.

Coming to dinner? I wonder if the police have found her yet?

PEGGY.

Oh, dear! Hurry, Freda! Hurry!

FREDA.

Here it is! *(In 'phone.)* Main 65, please. . . .
Six five. (Hangs up.) Line busy.

PEGGY.

Oh, dear! Oh, Freda, what shall I do? If I've spoiled Jack's arrangements——

VALERIE.

Oh, well, if she's a sensible woman, she'll see how it might have happened to any one. You can explain——

COMEDIES IN MINIATURE

FREDA (*drily*).

Explaining to the satisfaction of a very proud and exclusive woman how one came to take her for a thief and put the police upon her track is not the simplest thing in life, Val! And as for her husband—— (*Shrugs her shoulders.*)

PEGGY (*sobbing*).

Oh, dear!

FREDA (*in 'phone*).

Main six five, please. . . . (*Hangs up.*) Still busy.

VALERIE.

Try the hotel.

FREDA.

Three two five, isn't it? (*VALERIE nods.*) Main three two five, please. . . . Hello. Is that the Van Wyke? . . . The Van Wyke. . . . What number is that? . . . Oh, I beg pardon! They gave me the wrong number. . . . (*Hangs up.*)

PEGGY.

Oh, dear!

FREDA (*in 'phone*).

Central, you gave me the wrong number. I want Main three two five. . . . (*Hangs up.*) That line's busy, too. (*Takes receiver down again.*) Main six five. . . . Central, how long do you

THE KLEPTOMANIAC

permit a line to remain busy? . . . Well, I've
been trying for ten minutes to get this one. . . .
No, I'll hold this line until I get it. . . .
(*Hangs up impatiently.*) When I have more time
I'll report that girl!

PEGGY (*tremulously*).

Suppose they find her, what will they do?

VALERIE.

Search her, I suppose, won't they?

PEGGY.

O-o-oh!

FREDA (*in 'phone*).

Main six five. . . . Hello. Is this the Chief of
Police? . . . I'm speaking for Mrs. John Bur-
ton, whose purse was reported lost this afternoon.
Have you taken any steps to find it? . . . You
have?

PEGGY.

Oh, Freda!

FREDA.

Keep still, Peggy! (*In 'phone.*) What? . . .
Well, will you please stop the proceedings at once?

PEGGY.

What have they done?

COMEDIES IN MINIATURE

FREDA.

Do keep still, Peggy! (*In 'phone.*) What? . . .
No, the things have not been found (PEGGY *sobs*),
but we have learned that it's impossible that the
woman who sat next Mrs. Burton could have taken
them. We're most anxious that no rumour of this
suspicion should reach her. . . . What? . . .
Do you think you can intercept him?

PEGGY.

Oh, Freda, have they arrested her?

FREDA.

Peggy! (*In 'phone.*) Oh, please try! And we're
very sorry to have made you so much trouble.
. . . No, the purse has not been found. . . .
Thank you. Good-bye. (*Hangs up.*)

VALERIE.

Well?

FREDA.

He says they've sent a detective up to the hotel, but
he may be able to intercept him, and he'll keep a
lookout for the purse.

PEGGY

Oh, no! He mustn't! Oh, don't let him, Freda!

THE KLEPTOMANIAC

FREDA.

Why, that won't do any harm, Peggy. He may be able to find the things. (*Door-bell rings.*)

PEGGY.

No! Oh, no, no! I think policemen are simply awful! I didn't want you to report this in the first place. You know I didn't! And if it hadn't been reported, I shouldn't be in this awful scrape! You see, I was right about it all the time, and I simply won't be mixed up with them any more! You tell them not to do a thing about the purse, Freda.

FREDA (*rising*).

I won't tell them anything so silly. If you want to say that, you say it yourself. (*Telephone bell rings.*)

PEGGY.

You answer it, Freda.

FREDA (*coldly*).

No, I think you'd better do your own telephoning after this.

Enter MABEL, breathless and dishevelled, her hat awry and her hair disordered.

COMEDIES IN MINIATURE

PEGGY, FREDA, VALERIE.

Mabel!

MABEL (*panting*).

Have they caught her?

THE OTHERS.

No! Why?

MABEL.

Well, I just happened to remember that I told Charlie all about it, and he's gone up to the hotel to catch her.

THE OTHERS.

What!

MABEL.

I—I thought it was so dreadful for Peggy to lose her engagement ring, you know—for I know how I'd feel if I lost mine—I'd almost rather lose my wedding ring—— (*Stops for breath.*)

FREDA (*sharply*).

Well? Well? Well?

MABEL.

So I 'phoned Charlie while you were all in the other room with Miss Evans——

FREDA.

Heavens! We forgot all about the Evans woman! She'll make no end of trouble!

THE KLEPTOMANIAC

MABEL.

And he said he'd go right up to the hotel, and if he saw the woman he'd just *talk* to her, and make her give up poor Peggy's things. (*All the others drop into chairs with ejaculations.*)

PEGGY.

Oh, dear!

FREDA.

Ye gods!

VALERIE.

Good gracious!

MABEL.

And when I found that she was sort of a connection of Jack's in a business way, I thought I'd better come back and tell you—and I ran nearly all the way!

FREDA.

Well, now you *have* done it!

VALERIE.

This is what comes of sharing all the dear little details!

MABEL (*tearfully*).

Well, I wanted to help poor Peggy, and—and I knew Charlie could—— (*Telephone bell rings.*)

COMEDIES IN MINIATURE

FREDA.

Yes, undoubtedly Charlie could! I wonder if we can intercept *him* anywhere?

MABEL.

No, I think not, for he said he'd leave the office at once and wouldn't be home until he'd found the woman.

VALERIE.

And if there's any one characteristic that Charlie possesses in abundance it's perseverance!

PEGGY.

But he doesn't know her!

MABEL.

Oh, I described her very carefully, you know. I said she had on a brown tailor suit, made with a seven-gored skirt——

FREDA, PEGGY (*groaning*).

Oh, Mabel! (*Telephone bell rings a long peal.*)

PEGGY (*in 'phone*).

Well? . . . Yes. . . . Oh, the Van Wyke! Yes, yes, we have just learned that it was Mrs. Howard, and oh, you won't say anything to her about it, will you? . . . Oh, no, not for the

THE KLEPTOMANIAC

world! . . . And you won't let any of those horrid policemen see her, will you? . . . Yes (*tearfully*), they've sent a detective. . . . No, we—we haven't found it yet.

FREDA.

Ask if Charlie's there.

PEGGY.

Oh, thank you, Mr.—is this Mr. Collins? . . . Thank you, Mr. Collins. . . . Yes, all my rings. They hurt my fingers, you know, and I took them off and——

VALERIE.

Ask if Charlie's there!

PEGGY.

Yes, and a hundred dollars besides. . . . But you won't ever let Mrs. Howard know, will you? Because her husband is——

MABEL.

Peggy! Ask if Charlie's there!

PEGGY.

What? . . . Oh, thank you, Mr. Collins. We're so sorry——

COMEDIES IN MINIATURE

FREDA

(*firmly taking receiver away from PEGGY, who starts indignantly*).

Mr. Collins, do you know Mr. Charles Dover?
. . . Well, if a young man with light hair and dark eyes comes inquiring for Mrs. Howard, or for a woman in a brown tailor suit, tell him the matter has been arranged; and whatever you do, don't let him see Mrs. Howard. . . . Er—y—yes, a—a sort of detective.

MABEL.

Freda!

FREDA.

Thank you. Good-bye. (*Hangs up.*)

MABEL.

Freda, you had no business to say Charlie was a detective!

FREDA.

Well, I had to prevent his seeing her in some way.

MABEL.

Well, that won't prevent him, for I told him the police and hotel people had been notified, and you know Charlie says the police never go about anything the right way, so he isn't going to let them get an inkling that he's trying to see her, for fear they go and spoil it all. But he's going to the la-

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dies' entrance, and he's going to stand there until he sees her, and then he'll speak to her and make her give up Peggy's things.

PEGGY.

Oh, oh, oh! How can I ever look Jack in the face again! (*She sits, on the left, weeping.*)

MABEL

(*sitting, on the right, weeping.*)

I—I'm awfully sorry, girls, but I wanted to help!

FREDA.

Well, you helped!

VALERIE (*hopefully*).

Maybe he won't see her.

FREDA.

Yes, and maybe he will—and we all know Charlie! (*PEGGY and MABEL weep more convulsively.*)

VALERIE.

Well, perhaps she has the things. Perhaps she is a kleptomaniac. Peggy may get her rings by the operation, anyway.

FREDA.

COMEDIES IN MINIATURE

Yes, and Jack has a deal on that involves a hundred times the value of that purse and everything in it!

MABEL.

Except P-p-peggy's engagement ring! Nothing could ever make up for that!

PEGGY.

Oh, my rings! Oh, Ja-ack! Oh, *de-e-e-ear!*

MABEL.

Imagine entertaining a kleptomaniac at dinner! Oh, girls, do you suppose she'll wear the rings?

FREDA.

Well, not if Charlie has met her! Val, I'm going to the hotel to see if I can find Charlie. You telephone to the *Top Crest* and get that Evans woman. Tell her—oh, tell her that I want to see her at my house at eight o'clock to-night. I'll tell her some sort of a tale that may get us all into print, but anyway, it will be better than having the truth come out about poor Peggy. You stay here, and if I find Charlie, I'll 'phone. And if the woman comes before I do, it will be sure proof that she didn't meet Charlie, for not even a kleptomaniac would

THE KLEPTOMANIAC

accept a dinner invitation in the face of an accusation like that! (Exit FREDA.)

PEGGY.

Oh, what will Jack say? Oh, girls, what shall I tell Jack?

MABEL.

Well, you ought to have told Jack in the first place! If you had, I shouldn't have dragged poor Charlie into it! (Both weep.)

VALERIE (*in 'phone*).

Main 7, please. . . . Hello. Is that the *Top Crest*? . . . Is Miss Evans there? . . . Just left? . . . Will she be back to-night? . . . To the Van Wyke! . . . To interview *who*? . . . Mrs. Otis Howard! *My land!* Well, if she returns, will you tell her that Miss Freda Dixon wishes to see her on very important business, and that Miss Dixon will be at home at eight o'clock?

Enter FREDA, wearing hat and carrying fur coat.

VALERIE (*continuing*).

What? . . . You can 'phone her? . . . Oh, thank you! . . . Yes, it's very important. . . . No, it must be Miss Evans. . . . Thank you. Good night. (*Hangs up.*)

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FREDA (*struggling into coat*).

What do they say?

VALERIE.

Freda! The Evans woman has gone to the Van Wyke to interview Mrs. Otis Howard!

FREDA

(*pausing, with the coat half on*).

Ye gods!

VALERIE.

She has just left, and they think they can 'phone her and give her your message.

FREDA (*scrambling into coat*).

Well, I have always prided myself on being a direct descendant of Ananias, but I doubt if I shall be equal to the occasion if that woman has smelled a mouse. Where are my gloves? (*Feels in coat-pocket.*) I—why (*examining coat*)—this isn't my coat! It's Peggy's. (*As she takes the coat off she pauses again, startled.*) Why—what's that?—It's—it's—girls! Girls! I've got it! Here it is!

THE OTHERS.

What? What?

Enter KATIE with a card, to which she vainly tries to attract PEGGY'S attention.

THE KLEPTOMANIAC

FREDA.

Peggy's purse! There was a rip in the lining——

PEGGY

(seizing the purse and kissing it rapturously).

My purse! My purse!

VALERIE.

There was a rip in the lining!

KATIE.

Mrs. Burton! There's a lady below!

PEGGY *(taking card).*

Mrs. Otis Howard!

VALERIE.

Then she *has* come!

MABEL.

Then Charlie——

PEGGY.

Then Jack——

FREDA.

Then all of us——

ALL TOGETHER.

Oh, *girls!*

CURTAIN.

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A PIPE OF PEACE

A PIPE OF PEACE

A Comedy in One Act

CHARACTERS

Joseph Terrill.

Gladys Terrill.

Molly, the maid.

The Terrills' dining-room, low-ceiled, and panelled in dark woods, is lighted by many candles, held in brass candlesticks of every conceivable age and country. They adorn the table, the buffet, the sideboard, the mantel, and are placed at intervals on a shelf which runs around the room, where they stand between pieces of antique and more or less perfectly preserved china, and strange Oriental, Russian, and Hungarian brasses. The brass andirons in the fireplace date back four generations, as does the warming-pan hanging near them. The polished floors are covered with rare Eastern rugs, and everything about the room betokens the enthusiastic collector. The dining-table, on the left, is daintily equipped, and on a small writing-table, on the opposite side of the room, stand a desk telephone, lighted candles, and a brass jar of twisted paper spills. A wide doorway at the back, on the right, discloses the divans, lounging chairs, pipe-racks, and other comfortable paraphernalia of the smoking-room beyond. Another doorway, at the back on the left, leads to the hall, and a third door, on the left, to the butler's pantry.

At the table, GLADYS TERRILL, a slender, grace-

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ful, impulsive young woman, charmingly dressed, sits opposite her big, good-natured, tender-hearted husband, whose glance is steady and whose chin is firm.

They are just finishing dinner.

JOE

(taking the last sip of his coffee).

Ah! That new cook is a jewel, Gladys! That's better coffee than I've had before in a month.

GLADYS *(smiling)*.

Even at the club?

JOE.

Even at the club. It's a fitting finish to a perfect dinner. *(To himself, as he pushes back his chair.)* I wonder how long it will take her to confess? *(To her.)* If I were a suspicious man, or you were an artful woman—and were I the one, you would undoubtedly become the other—I should suspect that you had some reason to fear my displeasure *(GLADYS moves uneasily)*, and had planned this dinner for the special purpose of disarming me. I thought I was cross when I came home, and I know I was tired and anxious; but now—it needs but a pipe and some music to make my contentment complete. *(He rises and walks toward the smoking-room.)*

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GLADYS (*hastily*).

Oh, Joe, I forgot to tell you! I got such a gem of a chair to-day!

JOE

(*in the smoking-room, absently, as he looks from side to side*).

Yes?

GLADYS.

A genuine antique—mahogany, of course. It belonged to Martha Washington's mother, and is in perfect condition.

JOE.

That's good. Gladys, do you know where my pipe is?

GLADYS

(*rising, laughing nervously*).

What pipe? You have so many! I don't smoke your pipes, Joe! But come, let me tell you about this chair! (JOE *abandons the search for the pipe and rejoins her*.) It's such a dear! It's quite low, with a high back, curved so (*illustrating*)—a most unusual shape, the man said. It's great luck to get a piece so well authenticated.

JOE.

Did he give you a pedigree with it?

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GLADYS.

Well, he assured me that it had belonged to the Custis family.

JOE.

The Custis family! I thought you said it belonged to Martha Washington's mother.

GLADYS.

Well, her name was Custis before it was Washington, wasn't it?

JOE.

To be sure, it was! *Mrs.* Custis.

GLADYS.

Oh! Why—that's so! Oh, well, he probably meant her mother-in-law. Some people disregard those small distinctions, you know.

JOE.

True. Accuracy seems incompatible with a taste for curios.

GLADYS.

And from the Custis family it passed to the Lees.

JOE.

Aurora Leigh, I suppose? Or was it the beautiful Annabel?

A PIPE OF PEACE

GLADYS.

Joe! And he bought it from a cousin of the Lees, a Mrs. Stanton, who has fallen upon evil days and has had to part with all of the family plate. Isn't it sad!

JOE

(*poking about among the brasses on the mantel*).
Very. I wonder where that pipe can be? I thought I put it in the rack last night.

GLADYS.

You did. That is—er—I *think* you did.

JOE.

Well, why isn't it there, then?

GLADYS.

Oh, well, never mind! Take another one. I want to show you the chair.

JOE.

But I want that one. Nothing but that meerschaum is fit to smoke after such a dinner!

GLADYS (*falteringly*).

Are you so *very* fond of it?

COMEDIES IN MINIATURE

JOE.

Fond of it! That pipe has been my best friend for years.

GLADYS (*archly*).

Your *best* friend?

JOE

(*in the doorway on his way to the smoking-room*).

When you flouted me and would none of me, my dear, it was my only solace! When I was trying to screw my courage to the proposing point, it was my sole confidante. And when, finally, you promised to marry me, it alone knew the ineffable joy that filled my soul! My pipe! My pipe! My kingdom for my pipe!

(*He disappears in the smoking-room.*)

GLADYS.

Oh, dear! . . . Joe, dear, come here a moment.

JOE (*outside*).

Just a moment. I want to find——

GLADYS (*faintly*).

No, dear; come now, please.

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JOE (*hurrying to her*).

What's the matter, dearie? Are you ill? Do you feel faint?

GLADYS (*holding him off*).

Oh, no, no—I'm all right, only— Sit there, please, while I tell you what—what I paid—for that chair.

JOE (*to himself*).

Aha! Now for the pipe story! (*To her, easily.*)
Oh, that's all right, dearie! I never question your expenditures, you know.

GLADYS.

Yes, but I—I—must tell you about—this one.

JOE

(*to himself, as he wheels up a chair for her*).

Poor little girl! I ought to tell her that I rescued the pipe. Confound it, though, it's time she had a lesson.

GLADYS.

Come, Joe!

JOE

(*with a grimace of mock resignation*).

Very well; but why this sudden enthusiasm over foundered furniture, anyway? I thought that

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nothing but ancient and honourable brass, with “the loving marks of the hammer” upon it, was worthy of your love—and your lucre.

GLADYS.

Oh, of course, brass is all very well, but I have a great deal of it; and it’s getting to be rather a vulgar and commonplace pursuit—collecting brass. Everybody’s doing it now.

JOE.

Has your dear, disagreeable friend Mrs. Corliss succeeded in getting any yet?

GLADYS.

Oh, she has a few small pieces, and one very good samovar and tray. Poor Mrs. Corliss! She called upon me last week, and when she saw my new candlesticks—the ones from Manila, you know—she positively grew pale! I knew how envious she was when she began talking of the mahogany table that descended to her from her great-grandmother, who belonged to an obscure branch of the Lee family. Then she said, in that lofty, patronising way of hers: “Nothing gives such an air of quiet distinction to a room, Mrs. Terrill, as a few fine old pieces of mahogany.”

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JOE (*laughing*).

Poor Gladys! And you hadn't a single stick!

GLADYS (*vindictively*),

Well, I have now! And it antedates her grandmother, too, and comes from the main branch of the same family, with the Custis connection back of that!

JOE.

Whee-ew! "Charge, Chester, charge! On, Stanley, on!" All right, dearie, I'm glad to see you win. (*Rises.*)

GLADYS (*breathlessly*).

Oh, Joe! Wait! That is—I—I haven't told you yet about that chair—about what I gave for it, you know.

JOE.

Oh, never mind, sweetheart. Nothing — within reason, of course—is too much to pay for a victory over Mrs. Corliss. I confess I don't like that woman; and I won't have her patronising you, confound her!

GLADYS (*taking courage*).

Then maybe you'll forgive me! You see, the man who had that chair heard, somehow, that I bought

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a good deal of brass, and he came here yesterday to tell me that he had some andirons and things. They weren't genuine antiques, and, of course, I didn't want them. Some one was in the reception-room at the time, and I received him in here, and—and—he saw—he saw that old meerschaum of yours in the pipe-rack——

JOE.

Gladys! You didn't——

GLADYS.

Wait, Joe! Please! He admired it very much——

JOE (*savagely*).

Of course he did! (*To himself.*) Oh, what a brute I am!

GLADYS.

And said that he had an order for just such a pipe from—from—oh, I've forgotten the name—some pipe collector—and asked me if I'd sell the pipe.

JOE.

And you?

GLADYS.

I said no, of course!

JOE.

Of course you did!

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GLADYS.

Then he asked me if I was interested in mahogany. Well, I remembered Mrs. Corliss and her stupid old table, so I said I was, and he told me about this chair and offered to bring it here to-day. So this morning he brought it and——

JOE (*indignantly*).

And stole my pipe! The villain! I'll have him——

GLADYS.

Oh, Joe, please wait!

JOE (*impatiently*).

Well, go on! Go on! What happened? Who is he? Where's his shop?

GLADYS.

He said he had another customer for the chair, who had offered him fifty dollars for it yesterday afternoon, but that he had promised me the first chance. I—I said that fifty dollars seemed a great deal for a small, plain chair, and then he said that—he said—he—oh, Joe! (*She hides her face.*)

JOE (*grimly*).

Go on. (*From this point JOE'S indignation becomes more and more genuine.*)

COMEDIES IN MINIATURE

GLADYS.

He said that if I'd let him have the pipe I might have the chair for—thirty dollars.

JOE.

Gladys, did you——

GLADYS.

I told him I'd speak to you about it; but he said the other customer was waiting for the chair——

JOE (*sarcastically*).

Of course the other customer was waiting! They always are! And the telephone, I suppose, was out of order?

GLADYS.

I did try to 'phone to you, Joe, but the boy said that you were out and wouldn't be back until after five o'clock.

JOE.

Well?

GLADYS.

So I told the man that I couldn't buy the chair, and he was taking it away when I happened to wonder who the other customer was. I asked him, and he couldn't remember the name, but said it was a lady

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living in Washington Avenue. Then I knew that it must be Mrs. Corliss, and he was very sure that that was the name——

JOE.

Of course he was! Oh, Gladys!

GLADYS.

Joe, he got clear to the gate with that chair, and when I thought of Mrs. Corliss's getting it I just couldn't let it go. I called him back and offered forty dollars for it——

JOE.

Why didn't you give him fifty?

GLADYS.

I hadn't it. I've exceeded my allowance already. And when he refused forty I—I—I gave him the pipe! (*Joe turns away, with a muttered exclamation.*) It was only an old stained thing, anyway, Joe; and I went right down town and bought you a nice new one! See! (*She goes to a cabinet and produces a new meerschaum, of a shape to arouse all a pipe-lover's wrath.*) Isn't that a nice clean one? (*Joe groans.*) And just think what fun you'll have colouring it! The other one was finished, wasn't it?

COMEDIES IN MINIATURE

JOE (*despairingly*).

Gladys, that pipe was—oh, hang it, what's the use!
Where's the chair?

GLADYS.

In the library. Why? (JOE touches a bell on the table.)

Enter from the butler's pantry MOLLY, the maid.

JOE.

Molly, bring in the old chair that Mrs. Terrill bought this afternoon. (*Exit MOLLY.*)

(JOE paces moodily to and fro, while GLADYS fusses nervously about the table, occasionally glancing at him.)

Enter MOLLY, pushing the chair before her. It is of plain, rather awkward shape. Its dark, scratched surface is rough with the accumulated dust of attic and second-hand shop, and its seat, once brave in glassy black haircloth, dull tatters of which still remain, is lumpy and without resilience. The weary springs have thrust themselves out at the bottom, and hang in dejected spirals, scraps of the ragged lining still clinging to them. Through a heavy silence, MOLLY pushes this forlorn remnant to the centre of the room, and then, tittering irrepressibly, she hurries out.

A PIPE OF PEACE

GLADYS

(her courage returning as she contemplates her purchase).

There, Joe! Don't you see what a prize that is? See that curve! So much feeling! And the——

JOE (*explosively*).

Gladys Terrill! You gave my pipe—and thirty dollars—for *that*?

GLADYS.

Why, Joe, that's——

JOE.

It's a blooming old fraud, that's what it is! And my pipe, my meerschaum pipe, went for—— (*He shakes his head in mournful despair.*)

GLADYS.

But Joe! You have so many pipes! And that one was all coloured. I thought the interest in a meerschaum lay in colouring it. You don't care to make collections, so I don't see why——

JOE.

For heaven's sake, Gladys! Do you change your fad so often that you have no comprehension of sentimental values? Does it mean nothing to you

COMEDIES IN MINIATURE

that a thing has been closely associated with all your moods for years? On my soul, I believe you're a lineal descendant of Esau—but you haven't even the decent excuse of hunger! One of these days I shall find that you've renounced me for a cracked teacup or an old bent spoon. *One* piece of silver would be about my price, I imagine, if it were a genuine antique!

GLADYS.

Joe, I may have been at fault, but I've done nothing to call down upon my head any such bitter, cruel tirade as this!

JOE.

Oh, haven't you? When you painted snow-scenes on wooden shovels and mounted them on plush plaques; when you daubed tropical landscapes on sections of stove-pipe and stood them in terra-cotta saucers for umbrella-stands; when you filled the house with millinery stuff and tied gilded artichokes to the backs of the easy-chairs with pink ribbons, "in the interests of sacred home-bred Art," did I make any remonstrance? When you pitched all that out and took to Japanese screens and bamboo furniture; tacked fans on the walls and put inflammable paper umbrellas over all the chandeliers; when you painted writhing, sprawling, repul-

A PIPE OF PEACE

sive gilt dragons on blue-cotton curtains and hung them in my bedroom, I said nothing. When you banished all the carpets and put down noisy, cold, comfortless, slippery hardwood floors, I risked my life daily without a murmur, and paid cheerfully for the Persian rugs!

GLADYS.

But, Joe, sanitary considerations——

JOE.

Yes, I know. Antique rugs, woven amid unspeakable filth and used for years in vile Oriental squalor—full of heaven knows how many kinds of microbes—are absolutely necessary to the latest improved modern sanitation! When you filled the house with cracked china, and raved over the “sincerity” of a pitcher that had lost its handle and wouldn’t hold water, I made no comment. And when you began buying brass, I saw the gas and the lamps and the electricity give place to sputtering candles in order that you might show your brass candlesticks, and I held my peace! Every nook and corner of this house is full of old junk that you paid Lord knows what for, and that you’ll donate, some day, to the Society for the Beautification of Scavengers’ Homes! But the end has come! I’ll be hanged if I’m going to submit to

COMEDIES IN MINIATURE

having all the comfortable chairs in the house banished to make room for stiff, spavined, knock-kneed old trumpery like that!

GLADYS (*with dignity*).

Joe, even if you have no appreciation of Art, you must admit that that chair has historic value.

JOE.

Historic nonsense! That chair's a bally old cheat on the face of it, and anybody can see with half an eye that it's no more of an antique than I am. It was probably in the heyday of its youth and beauty about the time your mother was married. (*He takes out his penknife and scratches the wood, while she flutters protestingly to the rescue.*) I thought so! You'll acknowledge, I think, that while I'm no judge of the values of sheet-iron umbrella-stands, or broken crockery, or battered brass, I do know something about woods, and I assure you that that chair is made of plain, ordinary, every-day *walnut!*

GLADYS.

Joe! Joe, you don't mean that! Walnut?

JOE.

Walnut! And for that, you bartered my meer-schaum pipe; the pipe that I got in Heidelberg;

A PIPE OF PEACE

that was the pride of my student days, and my friend and best companion in the disheartening years after my father's death! The pipe that I have coloured carefully and lovingly, and that has contributed to my pleasure and comfort every day for fifteen years! The colour in that pipe comprised the softest, smoothest, most exquisite tones imaginable, and was a constant source of delight to me. You tell me that I have no soul for beauty, no appreciation of Art, and then you sell that pipe for—*that!*

GLADYS

(icily, her back toward him).

Have you been quite brutal enough now? Are there any more unkind things that you wish to say? Have you hurt and humiliated me sufficiently? *(Turning suddenly upon him.)* I didn't know that your affections were so bound up in that ugly, smelly, old pipe, and I'm sure it would never occur to any sane person that the thing could be desirable!

JOE.

Ho, wouldn't it! It's not six months since Delvan offered me seventy-five dollars for it. It's one of the finest pieces of meerschaum in this country.

COMEDIES IN MINIATURE

GLADYS.

Delvan? Delvan! Who is Delvan?

JOE.

Fellow at the club who prides himself on his collection of pipes. He hasn't a meerschaum among them all to equal mine. He's been begging for it for months.

GLADYS (*tragically*).

Joe, he's the man!

JOE

(*his anger spent, concealing a smile*).

What man?

GLADYS.

The man who wants your pipe.

JOE (*coolly*).

Why, of course he wants my pipe. I just said so.

GLADYS.

I mean the man who said he wanted a pipe like that.

JOE.

Certainly; he wanted *that* one.

A PIPE OF PEACE

GLADYS.

Can't you see? You *are* so obtuse, Joe! The man said that a man had given him an order for a pipe, and he's the man.

JOE (*solicitously*).

Gladys, are you losing your mind? What man?

GLADYS.

Joe Terrill, you are the slowest! The man who sold the chair!

JOE (*slowly*).

Delvan is the man who sold——

GLADYS.

No, no, no! The man who sold the chair said he had an order from a pipe collector——

JOE.

Oh!

GLADYS.

And Delvan's the man!

JOE (*very deliberately*).

Damn!

GLADYS.

Joe!

COMEDIES IN MINIATURE

JOE.

Delvan's been making offers for that pipe for at least two years, and only last week I told him he'd never get it.

GLADYS (*timidly*).

Wouldn't he give it back to you, Joe?

JOE.

Give it back to me!

GLADYS.

Yes, if you told him the circumstances;—that I——

JOE (*distinctly*).

That my wife traded off a valuable pipe, my personal property, for an old walnut chair and thirty pieces of silver? Oh, yes, I dare say that if I told him that, he'd return the pipe—with his condolences!

GLADYS.

Oh, Joe! Of course, you couldn't tell him that; but—but *I* can, and I will. (*She runs to the writing-table and takes up the telephone directory.*) I'll telephone to him this very minute that I——

JOE (*sternly*).

You'll do nothing of the kind! (*He takes the book from her, closing it.*) This is not a matter to be

A PIPE OF PEACE

adjusted over the telephone, and I forbid you, Gladys, to say anything whatever about this matter to Mr. Delvan, either now or at any future time.

GLADYS (*rising, aghast*).

You forbid me!

JOE.

I forbid you! (*Exit JOE to hall.*)

(GLADYS *stares after him in amazement, gasps, blinks, and then, as the full realisation of the result of her bargaining overwhelms her, she wrings her hands and drops into a chair at the writing-table, burying her face in her arms.*)

Enter JOE, carrying his hat, overcoat, and a heavy stick.

JOE.

What's this curio dealer's name, Gladys? And where's his shop?

GLADYS (*dully*).

His name's Gortowski, and his shop's in Curtis Place. Why?

JOE.

I'm going there to see if he's sold the pipe.

COMEDIES IN MINIATURE

GLADYS (*rising in alarm*).

Now?

JOE.

Now.

GLADYS.

But his shop will be closed.

JOE.

I'll find him. Those people always live in or behind or under or over their shops. I'll find him.

GLADYS.

But suppose he's sold the pipe?

JOE.

Then it's gone.

GLADYS.

And if not?

JOE.

If not, I shall buy it of him.

GLADYS.

But—but, Joe, he'll ask an awful lot of money for that pipe.

JOE (*grimly*).

Very probably. It's worth a lot. Good-bye.

A PIPE OF PEACE

GLADYS.

But—Joe, I'm afraid for you to go down into that neighbourhood at night. It's dangerous!

JOE.

Nonsense!

GLADYS.

Take me with you, then!

JOE.

No, I prefer to go alone.

GLADYS.

Why?

JOE.

Well—I think—that is—I can do more with him if you—at least, if I'm alone.

GLADYS

(her alarm rapidly increasing).

Joe, do you think you'll have trouble with him? Is that it? Oh, Joe dear, don't go! I'll get your pipe back somehow, if I have to go down on my hands and knees for it, only don't—*(hysterically)* don't go down there and fight with that man!

JOE *(patting her hand reassuringly).*

No, no! What a nervous little woman it is! I've no intention of fighting with him, but I may have

COMEDIES IN MINIATURE

to—well, to scare him, and I can do that better if you're not with me.

GLADYS.

Scare him? How?

JOE (*to himself*).

Jingo! This is more than I bargained for! (*To her.*) Oh, threaten him with some legal process, or something. Don't fret about it, Gladys. I'll get the pipe if it's there, but nobody will be hurt.

GLADYS.

Oh, I'm so frightened! Have you your revolver?

JOE.

No, this stick will do.

GLADYS.

Oh, please take your revolver, dear! It wouldn't be safe to go down there without it!

JOE.

That isn't a bad neighbourhood.

GLADYS.

It may be—at night. *Please*, dear!

A PIPE OF PEACE

JOE.

I don't believe it's loaded.

GLADYS.

No, don't you remember? I made you take out the—the—what-you-may-call-'ems, and I put them, for safety, in a jeweller's box at the back of my top drawer.

JOE.

There must be a box of cartridges somewhere.

GLADYS.

Yes, they're there, too—in my top drawer. Please get them, dear.

JOE.

All right—though there's no earthly need of it. (*He pauses at the hall door.*) Your top drawer, you say?

GLADYS.

Yes; 'way at the back, under some laces—or maybe it's handkerchiefs. You'll find them, anyway.

(*Exit JOE, leaving his hat, coat, and stick on a chair near the dining-table.*)

(*GLADYS wanders about in deep distress, until a sudden thought halts her abruptly. Her kindling glance turns toward the writing-*

COMEDIES IN MINIATURE

table, then toward the hall. She listens keenly for an instant, eagerly runs to the telephone, seizes the receiver and speaks rapidly.)

GLADYS.

Main three seven one. . . . Yes. . . . No,
Main three seven one! . . . Hello! Is that
the Union Club? . . . Is Mr. Fred Terrill
there? . . . If you find him, ask him to come
to the 'phone at once, please. *Hurry!* . . .
(Pause, during which she taps her foot, glances apprehensively toward the hall, and frowns.)
. . . Hello! Oh, hello, Fred! . . . Yes,
Gladys. Oh, Fred, I'm in the most awful scrape!
How much money have you? . . . What?
. . . How much do I want? . . . Oh,
seventy-five or a hundred dollars, I suppose.
Perhaps more. . . . What? . . . You can
get it? . . . Thank Heaven! Then go to
Gortowski's curio shop in Curtis Place—it's not
far from the club—and get Joe's pipe. Give him
any sum he asks and I'll repay you when I get my
next allowance. *Run, Fred!* . . . Joe's pipe.
The meerschaum, you know. . . . Oh, never
mind! I'll tell you all about it to-morrow. . . .
Well, if you must know, I traded it for a horrid
old chair and I must get it back. . . . Yes,

A PIPE OF PEACE

the one he got in Heidelberg. . . . Oh, yes, I know! Never mind about that. Joe's said it all! . . . Joe says he's going down for the pipe to-night, and I'm afraid he'll kill the man! He's getting his revolver now. You *must* get there first. Will you go?

JOE (*from the head of the stairs*).

Gladys!

GLADYS (*in 'phone*).

Wait a minute! (*She runs to the door.*) Yes, Joe?

JOE.

I can't find those cartridges. It was your revolver you put in your top drawer.

GLADYS.

Oh, so it was! Let me think! . . . Oh (*slowly*), I must have put the—er—bullet things in my bonnet-box. The round one on the top shelf—left-hand side—back. (*She listens a moment, mischievously smiling, nods triumphantly, and runs back to 'phone. As she goes, she pauses long enough to thrust Joe's stick under the edge of a rug. She speaks in 'phone.*) Hello, Fred! . . . Oh, hello! Will you go? . . . Oh, you're a darling! And oh, Fred, if you get the pipe,

COMEDIES IN MINIATURE

'phone me at once, won't you? I'm nearly crazy! I'll keep him here as long as I can. He's hunting for his cartridges now, and I've told him the wrong place, so he won't find them right away! And I've hidden his stick. Run, Fred! And—hello! . . . Hello! . . . Fred! . . . Don't forget to 'phone me. . . . Yes. . . . Yes. . . . That's right. Good-bye. (*She sighs as she hangs up the receiver.*)

JOE comes in from the hall, snapping an unloaded revolver. Every time the trigger falls, she starts apprehensively.

JOE.

I can't find those cartridges, Gladys, but here's the gun. I could run a tolerably successful bluff with this, if it were necessary—which it won't be. (*Takes up his hat and coat and looks about for his stick.*) Where's my stick?

GLADYS.

Your stick? Why—you brought it in here with you, didn't you?

JOE.

I thought I did. Confound the thing! Where has it gone to?

GLADYS.

Maybe you left it in the hall.

A PIPE OF PEACE

JOE.

No, don't you remember? When you spoke of the revolver I said——

GLADYS.

You said the stick would do, but did you have it in your hand?

(After a moment spent in further search, JOE goes into the hall. GLADYS covers the stick more completely with the rug, making sure it is perfectly concealed, and is once more apparently looking for the missing cane when JOE re-enters, with a lighter one.)

JOE.

Never mind, Gladys, this one will do. Good-bye.

GLADYS (*firmly*).

No, Joe; if you won't carry a loaded revolver, you *must* take a heavy stick. Now I think of it, perhaps you had the big one in your hand when you started upstairs for the revolver. Maybe you left it up there.

JOE.

Possibly I did. (*He goes toward the hall and pauses in the doorway.*) By the way, who telephoned just now?

COMEDIES IN MINIATURE

GLADYS (*innocently*).

Telephoned?

JOE.

Yes; weren't you at the 'phone?

GLADYS.

Oh—why—oh, it was Fred, you know. Said he might be up by-and-by. Why don't you wait until he comes? Then he can go down with you and help intimidate the man.

JOE.

I thought he was going to take May Sloane and her mother to the opera to-night. Said he was.

GLADYS.

Oh, did he? Maybe he's coming up after—that is, *before*—at least—perhaps she's sick and can't go!

JOE.

Guess not. I came up in the car with her to-night, and she seemed unusually lively.

GLADYS.

Oh, well, perhaps I misunderstood Fred. He was in a great hurry about something. Maybe he said he *couldn't* come up to-night.

A PIPE OF PEACE

JOE.

That's funny, too. You weren't expecting him, were you?

GLADYS.

No—yes—oh, I don't know. Maybe I was. I can't pretend to remember all the engagements your brother makes and breaks with me!

JOE (*mournfully*).

Fred will feel mighty bad about this pipe business! That meerschaum was the only one of my bachelor possessions that he envied me. (*Sighs.*) Well—I must find that stick. (*As he turns to go, the telephone bell rings. He moves to answer it and GLADYS dexterously slides into the chair and takes the receiver.*) Who's that?

GLADYS.

How should I know? Run along and get your stick. He'll have time to sell that pipe four times before you get there at this rate! (*JOE goes out, leaving hat and coat, as before, on the chair. GLADYS speaks eagerly in 'phone.*) Hello! . . . Hello! . . . Yes. Hello, Fred! Did you get it? . . . What? . . . Sold? . . . Not there! Oh, impossible! He's deceiving you! I gave it to him myself, and if he hasn't sold it, it must be— . . . *What?* . . . Joe! . . . Oh, no!

COMEDIES IN MINIATURE

There's some mistake! . . . What! *Joe?* Wait a minute. (*Glancing toward the hall, she goes to JOE'S coat, and after feeling hurriedly in several pockets, she suddenly pauses. Her shoulders stiffen and her lips form a rigid line as she slowly draws forth a very handsome meerschaum pipe-bowl, attached to the long stem affected by German students. She places it very carefully on the dining-table and returns, with great dignity and deliberation, to the telephone. When she speaks, her tone is icy and her enunciation sharply precise.*) Very well, Fred. . . . Yes, it is here. . . . I do not know. Your brother has not explained. . . . Yes. Thank you. . . . Good-bye. (*She hangs up the receiver and crosses slowly to the opposite side of the dining-table, where she sits, her back to the hall door.*)

Presently enter JOE.

JOE (*irritably*).

I can't find that stick anywhere, Gladys. I'm going without it. (*Takes up his hat and coat and goes to the door.*) Good-bye. (*He pauses in the doorway.*) Good-bye, Gladys. (*Save for a barely perceptible twitching of the erect shoulders, there is no reply. He steps toward her, and as he does so he catches sight of the pipe lying on the table. He pauses,*

A PIPE OF PEACE

half smiling, in whimsical appreciation of the situation, drops his coat and hat, thrusts his hands into his trousers' pockets, looks at GLADYS, at the pipe, and at GLADYS again. Whistles, softly, three ascending notes, and then attempts a debonair manner. Oh—ah, ha, ha, ha! I see you—er—you found the pipe! (GLADYS surveys him scornfully, and an uneasy note creeps into his laugh.) Little joke, you see! Thought I'd—ha, ha, ha! Didn't work, though! (Rather ruefully.) Might have known it wouldn't! You're so deuced clever, you know! Ha, ha—ha—ha. (Mirthlessly his laugh dies out and he regards her motionless figure nervously.) Oh—er—Gladys! I say—Gladys!

GLADYS (*in a level tone*).

Well?

JOE

(fingering the pipe for inspiration).

Aren't you glad I got it?

GLADYS.

Very.

JOE.

Why don't you exhibit symptoms of joy, then?

GLADYS.

There are moments when one's emotions may be rather varied. Since you seem so well satisfied with

COMEDIES IN MINIATURE

yourself and the situation (*rising*) I will remove my unsympathetic presence and leave you to the full and complete enjoyment of your pipe and—your amusing reflections! (*As she sweeps toward the door he intercepts her and attempts to touch her arm. She recoils and stands very erect.*)

JOE.

Oh, I say, now, Gladys! Don't be hard on a fellow! Maybe I did carry it a trifle too far——

GLADYS.

A *trifle* too far?

JOE.

Well, you went rather far yourself, didn't you?

GLADYS.

Possibly I did—but, at any rate, *I* was truthful! *I* didn't stoop to petty, contemptible deception!

JOE.

Deception is rather a strong word to apply to a harmless little joke.

GLADYS.

And you regard it only as a "harmless little joke" to deceive your wife, to let her make a long, painful

A PIPE OF PEACE

and entirely unnecessary confes—*explanation*, to hurt and humiliate her with your reproaches, to swear at her——

JOE.

Gladys!

GLADYS.

You said damn! To frighten her nearly to death with your threats——

JOE.

My dear girl, I made no threats!

GLADYS.

Nor did you go pawing through my laces for your revolver, I suppose!

JOE.

At your request, however.

GLADYS (*hysterically indignant*).

Probably I should have enjoyed the prospect of having you killed by that awful old Gortowski, but——

JOE.

Gladys, there was no question of killing nor of fighting, except what existed in your imagination. The plain facts in the case are these. I stepped

COMEDIES IN MINIATURE

into the club to-night and met Delvan. He said: "Come on with me, Terrill. I've just heard of a pipe that by all accounts beats yours, and I'm going to see it. Old Gortowski got it for me." So we walked over to Gortowski's shop, and there we found—my pipe!

GLADYS.

Well?

JOE.

Well, of course, we both recognised it at once, and I questioned the fellow sharply. Little by little he told us the principal facts, as you have told them to me since. Delvan knows a thing or two himself about antiques and curios, and he had seen the chair and knew it wasn't genuine. So, together, we bullied and threatened the old rascal——

GLADYS.

Threatened him with what?

JOE (*easily*).

Oh, with suit for obtaining money under false pretences, and—other things.

GLADYS.

What other things? Joe, you have deceived me long enough! Tell me the truth.

A PIPE OF PEACE

JOE.

Well, you see, dear, the pipe was—was really—well—*mine*, you know, and—he had—er—had—well—received it—from—from you, you know, and——

GLADYS (*hotly*).

In other words, you accused him of *receiving—stolen goods!*

JOE.

Well, something like that, I believe. Delvan's a lawyer, too, you know, and between us we piled it on rather strong.

GLADYS.

And so, for the sake of a piece of old meerschaum, you've not only lied to your wife but you have branded her before your friend and a vulgar curio dealer as—*as a thief!* Don't touch me! Don't *dare* to touch me!

JOE (*contritely*).

Gladys, my darling, what can I say to you?

GLADYS.

Nothing. It is best that you should say nothing. Any explanations that you could make would only serve to intensify the situation. (*She moves majestically toward the door.*)

COMEDIES IN MINIATURE

JOE (*desperately*).

But, Gladys, you do me great injustice! Delvan will tell you——

GLADYS.

I do not know Mr. Delvan, nor do I care to know him, and it can hardly be supposed that he desires to meet—a thief, condemned by her own husband!

JOE.

But I *didn't* condemn you, dearie! Delvan said——

Enter MOLLY, carrying a box of flowers and a note, which she takes to GLADYS.

MOLLY.

The messenger is waiting for an answer.

GLADYS (*reading the note*).

“My dear Mrs. Terrill: Will you accept the compliments and congratulations of a crusty old——” You may go, Molly. (*MOLLY goes out. When the door has closed behind her, GLADYS resumes:*)——“of a crusty old bachelor who greatly desires to be called your friend? My compliments are due to any woman who is sufficiently charming to keep her husband romantically in love with her after many years of married life, and my congratulations are offered because that fine fellow, Terrill, quarrelled with me

A PIPE OF PEACE

this afternoon (JOE *smiles broadly*) when, in order to obtain possession of that marvellous pipe, I slandered you. I trust, however, that his wrath may have cooled somewhat ere this (JOE, *still smiling, fills the pipe from a pocket-pouch and strolls over to the writing-table, where he selects, with great care, a spill from those in the jar*), and I beg, not only that you will accept my apologies for this afternoon's calumny, but that you will grant me permission to call upon you this evening, that he and I may smoke together a pipe of peace. (JOE *lights the spill in the candle-flame.*) Hopefully yours, CHAUNCEY COLE DELVAN." (*The note flutters to the floor.*) Oh, Joe!

(*He quickly extinguishes the burning spill, and as he holds out eager arms to her, she runs to him and hides her face on his shoulder.*)

CURTAIN.

A CHRISTMAS CHIME

A CHRISTMAS CHIME

*A voice, a chime,
A chant sublime
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!*

—LONGFELLOW.

CHARACTERS

Joseph Terrill.

Gladys Terrill.

Dolly Wakelee.

Ted Owen.

The living-room in the Terrills' country-house is a large, comfortable apartment, where dark woods, Oriental rugs and hangings, wide window-benches, and low, deep-seated chairs and divans, combine to give an air of restfulness and of familiar use. In the early dusk of a December afternoon blazing logs are supported by the old andirons in the fireplace, and the firelight dances across bits of brass, copper, and choice cloisonné, reveals rows of well-worn bindings in many low bookcases, blends into one white line the keys of the grand piano, and plays among the shadows of the Christmas garlands, holly wreaths, and mistletoe with which the room is hung.

JOE TERRILL, genial, kindly, tender, but capable of determined tenacity of purpose, disposes his generous length and avoirdupois as best he may at the top of a shaky step-ladder, while he suspends a branch of mistletoe from the top of a doorway leading to the hall. GLADYS, his wife, stands on an easy-chair near an opposite door, which leads to the dining-room, arranging vines over a picture-frame. She is of medium height, slender, graceful, impetuous, with a musical voice and a quick and captivating manner.

COMEDIES IN MINIATURE

Their task is almost finished. One or two unused wreaths lie on a small table, and the room is more or less in disorder.

GLADYS.

What time is it, Joe?

JOE (*looking at his watch*).

Four twenty-eight.

GLADYS.

Dolly's train is due in two minutes. I wonder if it will be on time?

JOE (*his mouth full of tacks*).

Ted's is due in five.

GLADYS.

Dear old Ted! I shall be so glad to see him! He hasn't been here in—how long is it, Joe? Three months?

JOE.

Well, it's even longer than that since we've seen Dolly.

GLADYS.

I suppose she's been too busy preparing her trousseau to make visits. She hasn't even written to me for weeks. She accepted this invitation by postal!

A CHRISTMAS CHIME

JOE (*fumbling in his pockets*).

Oh, by Jove! Here's a letter that came for you yesterday and I forgot to give it to you.

GLADYS.

Oh, Joe, how could you!

JOE

(*contritely, scrambling down from the ladder*).

I'm sorry, dear. It's from Dolly, too.

GLADYS.

From Dolly? I hope she hasn't decided not to come! (*She takes the letter from him and hastily opens it.*) Not dated, of course! Just like Dolly! (*Reads.*) "Dear Gladys: Before I come to you, I think I'd better tell you—" Oh, she's coming, then! (*She perches on an arm of the chair, her feet in the seat, and reads rapidly and indistinctly. JOE returns to his task.*) "Save us all embarrassment — m-m-m-m—you understand—m-m-m-m—my engagement to Mr. Owen—" *Joe!*

JOE.

Well, what is it? (*GLADYS reads on rapidly, ignoring him.*) Gladys! Gladys (*impatiently, rejoining*

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ing her), what's the matter? Can't you tell a fellow?

GLADYS

(tragically, lowering the letter.)

Joe Terrill, we're in the most awful scrape! You must wire Ted not to come. *(She reads the letter again.)*

JOE.

Wire Ted not to come! Why, my dear girl, he's almost at the gate by this time!

GLADYS.

I can't help that. He mustn't come!

JOE.

Why mustn't he come? Isn't Dolly coming?

GLADYS.

That's just it! Dolly *is* coming!

JOE.

Well?

GLADYS.

Listen to this! *(Reads.)* "Dear Gladys: Before I come to you, I think I'd better tell you something that will perhaps surprise you. It will save us all embarrassment if you and Joe understand before I arrive that my engagement to Mr. Owen has been

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broken off. Please do not question me, as I prefer not to talk about it, and I have nothing further to say except that this is final. I will never forgive him! Never! Yours, DOLLY.”

JOE (*slowly, in consternation*).

By the great horn spoon! What are we going to do? Didn't you tell Dolly that we had asked Ted to come, also?

GLADYS.

Why—I don't remember what I said. No, of course I didn't! If I had, she wouldn't be coming, would she?

JOE (*impatiently*).

Just like a woman! Can't even state plainly a simple invitation to spend Christmas!

GLADYS.

Well, it hasn't been necessary to tell her anything about Ted's movements lately. She's known more about his plans than he has himself.

JOE.

I know; but there's always danger of a situation like this. A little plain, business caution is never out of place. Now, if you had said——

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GLADYS (*with spirit*).

Oh, well, there's no great danger, after all, for of course you told Ted that we had invited Dolly.

JOE.

Er—no—I—I wrote rather hastily, you know, and——

GLADYS (*mischievously*).

Yes, but there's always danger of a situation like this, you know, and if you had used a little plain, business caution—! Now, *I* make no claim to a knowledge of business methods, but certainly I have a right to expect that *you* could state plainly a simple invitation to spend Christmas.

JOE (*hotly*).

Now, see here, Gladys, it's all very well for you to sit up there and jeer, but a man has rather too many things on his mind to pay much attention to social——

GLADYS.

Now, Joe, don't try to crawl out through that little aperture. You have done it often enough, I admit, to have worn an easy passage, even for your figure, but you must have learned, also, that it leads nowhere. And as both Dolly and Ted will be here within ten minutes, we have something more press-

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ing to do than to sit here and revile each other.
(*She steps down from the chair and joins him.*)
The question before the house is, what are we going to do with them?

JOE.

There's only one thing to do. Dolly's the aggressor ; Dolly must go.

GLADYS.

It would be interesting to know how you make that out.

JOE.

Dolly broke the engagement. If she hadn't done that, there would have been no such situation ; ergo, Dolly is responsible and must bear the consequences.

GLADYS.

But if Dolly broke the engagement, it was because Ted was unendurable.

JOE.

Oh, I don't know. My knowledge of Dolly would lead me to suspect that it might have been because he wore a blue cravat, or because he said he liked terrapin.

GLADYS.

You never were fair to Dolly ! She's capricious ; I admit that frankly——

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JOE (*drily*).

Thanks for the concession!

GLADYS.

But she's not unjust, and if she found it necessary to break her engagement to Ted, it was because——

JOE.

Now, see here, Gladys, Ted's a gentleman, isn't he?

GLADYS (*promptly*).

Yes.

JOE.

And an uncommonly thoughtful and unselfish fellow, isn't he?

GLADYS.

Y-yes.

JOE.

And head over heels in love with Dolly, isn't he?

GLADYS.

We-ell——

JOE.

Honor, now, Gladys!

GLADYS.

Oh, yes (*impatiently*), yes, I suppose so!

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JOE.

And Dolly is—well, call it capricious, isn't she? ✓

GLADYS (*reluctantly*).

Yes.

JOE.

And inclined to look with impartial favour on the sons of Adam?

GLADYS (*with spirit*).

Dolly is not a flirt!

JOE (*mildly*).

Oh, isn't she? Well—I didn't say she was, did I? ✓

GLADYS.

N-no, not exactly.

JOE.

And it stands to reason that if Dolly and Ted have had a few words and parted, it was not Ted's fault.

GLADYS (*resentfully*).

I never saw anything like the *esprit du corps* of you men! You'll quarrel bitterly among yourselves, but if it comes to a question of simple justice between a man and a woman, you'll take it for granted that the man is right, without making the slightest

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inquiry into the matter, and you'll stand by that man through thick and thin, right or wrong, to the bitter end, just because he is a man!

JOE (*coolly*).

Thanks. I'm glad to see that even in the heat of something approaching anger, you can still be just to us, and I regret that I cannot remember having found (*with a deprecatory smile*), in *other* members of your sex, the quality that you so generously attribute to mine. However, that's neither here nor there. As you said a few moments ago, we have no time to exchange compliments. We must decide what we are going to do.

GLADYS (*looking out a window*).

Too late! There comes the carriage, and Dolly's in it!

JOE (*looking out another window*).

And there comes Ted from the other station in the trap.

GLADYS.

Well, you'll have to explain to Ted——

JOE.

I'll do nothing of the sort! If there are to be any explanations, you'll make them—to Dolly.

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GLADYS.

Joe, I can't send Dolly away. She was my bridesmaid.

JOE.

You seem to have forgotten that Ted was my best man.

GLADYS (*almost in tears*).

If Ted stays, Dolly and I will have our meals served in our rooms. I will not have her subjected to his persecutions!

JOE (*gravely*).

You will, of course, do as you think best, but I should feel it a serious affront if my wife refused to receive a guest whom I had invited to our house. (*The door-bell rings.*)

GLADYS (*nervously*).

There she is! Oh, dear, what shall I do?

JOE.

Once for all, Gladys, Ted stays! (*He removes step-ladder, etc.*)

Enter from the hall DOLLY WAKELEE, a small, impulsive, imperative young woman, whose fair hair curls softly over a pink-and-white blossom face, and whose merry mouth is surrounded by

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twinkling dimples, the radiance of which is only faintly dimmed by her somewhat pensive bearing. She is in travelling dress and wears furs.

GLADYS (*running to meet her*).

Oh, you dear thing!

DOLLY.

Oh, Gladys!

GLADYS (*kissing her*).

I thought your train would never come!

DOLLY.

The old thing just poked! It stopped every time there was a board off the fence!

GLADYS

(*unfastening DOLLY's wraps*).

Such ages since we've seen you!

DOLLY.

Perfect æons!

GLADYS.

I'm so glad you could come! You're such a popular young person, we feared our invitation might be too late.

JOE (*in the background*).

Aren't you going to give me a chance to say a word to Dolly, Gladys?

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GLADYS.

Oh, of course! Joe's been so impatient for your arrival, Dolly! He's looked at his watch every ten minutes for the last hour.

DOLLY (*shaking hands with JOE*).

Joe's good to me always. I'll never be able to tell you (*pensively*) what a relief it is to be down here to-day! (*The door-bell rings.*)

GLADYS

(*starting nervously and looking at JOE*).

Oh, we're delighted! Simply delighted to have you here all to ourselves, you know. (*She makes frantic signals to JOE, who is wilfully obtuse, to intercept TED.*) Katie took your bag, didn't she? Let's go right up to your room, where you can lay aside your wraps.

JOE.

Perhaps you'd better explain to Dolly before she takes off her things——

GLADYS.

Oh, we shall have plenty of time for explanations and arrangements.

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JOE.

That other train goes in half an hour, you know.

GLADYS

(*transfixing him with a glare, but speaking lightly*).

Yes, I know; but it's too cold to go out again. I'm sure Dolly's had all the drive that she wants to-day. You'd better send one of the men (*with significant emphasis*) to the train with that letter.

JOE.

What letter?

GLADYS.

X The one that you expected Dolly and me to mail at the train, *dearie!* Come, Dolly; we'll go this way—through the dining-room.

TED (*in the hall*).

In the living-room, Katie? All right; I know the way.

DOLLY (*pausing, startled*).

Whose voice is that?

GLADYS (*hurriedly*).

That? Oh, that's—that's a man who has come to see Joe about—about game. He's been trespass-

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ing. He won't be here long. Joe will send him away. Come, Dolly, come! This way!

DOLLY (*uncertainly*).

It sounded like——

GLADYS.

Yes, yes, it sounded like—like a gentleman's voice, didn't it? He *is* a very superior sort of a trespasser. Don't be too tender-hearted, Joe, and make him understand (*meaningly*) that this must not continue.

(*Exit* GLADYS, *pushing* DOLLY *before her to the dining-room.*)

JOE.

Whew!

Enter from the hall TED OWEN, *a frank, energetic, vigorous young fellow, whose naturally hearty manner is somewhat subdued by the weight of a heavy heart.*

JOE (*cordially*).

Hello, old man!

TED (*shaking hands*).

Hello, Joe!

JOE.

I'm mighty glad you've come, old chap! We were afraid you might have some other engagement. It

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would have broken Gladys all up, you know. Actually, she's been trying to hurry the clock for three hours!

TED (*nervously walking about*).

Thanks. Gladys is always good to me. You and she are the right sort. I—er—has she heard—that is—is she well?

JOE.

Fine as a fiddle!

x

TED.

That's good! I—er—have you had any—that is—*many* guests lately?

JOE.

No, and we were saying just before you arrived that it was months since you'd been here.

TED.

Yes. Er—Joe, old man, have you—have you anything to smoke?

JOE.

I *beg* your pardon, Ted! Here (*offers cigarette-case*), or do you prefer a cigar?

TED.

Oh, thanks! (*Takes cigarette and absently thrusts it into his vest-pocket, to JOE's manifest amaze-*

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ment.) I wonder—has Gladys heard from—that is—have you heard the latest news from China?

JOE.

Still looks pretty squally, doesn't it?

TED.

Yes, and the worst of it is, she won't accept any explanation.

JOE.

Eh?

TED (*groaning*).

Oh, by Jove, I hoped she'd told you about it!

JOE.

Who?

TED.

Dolly.

JOE.

(*a sudden light of comprehension in his face*).

Oh! She has! Oh, yes, she has. Awfully sorry, old man! (*They shake hands solemnly.*)

TED.

Does Gladys know?

JOE.

Gladys knows. Oh, yes, *Gladys knows!*

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TED (*sighing*).

Oh, that's all right, then! I dreaded to tell her, for she and—and Miss Wakelee are such friends, I feared——

JOE (*with exaggerated cordiality*).

Surely you didn't think that Gladys would blame you? *You?* Oh, come, now, Ted! Gladys blame *you?*

TED.

Then she doesn't think——?

JOE.

Oh, no, she—that is—she—oh, here she comes!
(*Sighs deeply and wipes his brow.*)

Enter GLADYS from the dining-room.

GLADYS.

Oh, here's Ted! How do you do? (*She looks inquiringly at JOE, who vigorously shakes his head.*)

TED.

How do, Gladys? It's very good of you to ask me down here to-day under the circumstances. I can't tell you how I appreciate it.

GLADYS.

Then Joe hasn't told you——

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JOE (*hastily*).

No, I haven't had time to tell him. The fact is, Ted, Gladys and I—er—Gladys and I—(*suddenly*) want you to spend every Christmas with us! We consider you quite one of the family, you know, and we simply won't take no for an answer! Every Christmas, old man!

TED.

Now, that's mighty good of you, Gladys! That's what I call friendship! (GLADYS *perfunctorily smiles at him, but her glance at JOE is thorny.*)

JOE.

Then you'll do it?

TED.

You may count on me every time!

JOE.

Good!

GLADYS.

But this year, Ted——

JOE (*hastily*).

Yes, this year we should have been heart-broken—simply *heart-broken*, if you couldn't have come! By the way, you haven't seen our new team, have

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you? Don't you want to go out to the stable and take a look at them?

TED.

Delighted.

JOE.

Come on, then; Gladys will excuse us. (*He hurries TED into the hall, and pauses at the door, speaking cautiously to GLADYS.*) Have you told her?

GLADYS (*spiritedly*).

Indeed, I've not! If you don't tell him soon, he'll miss his train.

JOE.

I intend that he shall miss it! (*Exit JOE.*)

(*GLADYS makes a little gesture of weariness and despair.*)

Enter DOLLY from dining-room.

DOLLY.

Where's Joe? I thought I heard his voice.

GLADYS.

He's gone out to the stable to see the new team.

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DOLLY (*with enthusiasm*).

Oh, let's go, too! I simply adore horses!

GLADYS.

We'll go later—to-morrow, I mean. It's too cold now.

DOLLY (*strolling about*).

Do you mind cold? I don't.

GLADYS (*shivering ostentatiously*).

Oh, yes, I can't stand it at all.

DOLLY.

How odd! (*She approaches the window, and pauses, looking out.*) Gladys, who's that with Joe?

GLADYS.

With Joe! (*She hurriedly draws DOLLY away from the window.*) Oh, it's just the man I told you about; the horse man.

DOLLY (*trying to look out*).

The horse man? What horse man? You didn't say anything about a horse man.

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GLADYS.

Why, yes, I did! The man who came to see Joe, you know.

DOLLY.

You didn't say a word about a horse man. If you had, I should have stayed. I adore horses. You said a trespasser.

GLADYS.

Did I? Oh, yes, of course! Well, he *is* a trespasser. He's a horse man, and he's been letting his horses get into our field, and that (*triumphantly*) is trespass, you know!

DOLLY.

Oh! Well, what had that to do with game?

GLADYS.

Game?

DOLLY.

Yes, you said something about game.

GLADYS.

Oh, no! No, I didn't, Dolly.

DOLLY (*positively*).

You said that man had come to see Joe about game.

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GLADYS

(*disconcerted for an instant*).

Oh, I—I—why, no, I didn't, Dolly; I said claim! Joe's claim—for damages, you know. C, l, a, i, m, *claim!*

DOLLY (*eyeing her incredulously*).

Oh, did you? (*Turns toward window.*)

GLADYS (*detaining her*).

Of course I did! What a dear little ring, Dolly! Where did you get it?

DOLLY.

Why, don't you remember? Ted—at least—Mr. Owen gave it to me, long before we were—that is, a long time ago.

GLADYS.

Why, Dolly! Didn't you send back his gifts?

DOLLY (*indignantly*).

Certainly I did! But this little ring (*pensively*) was—different! It was the first thing he ever gave me, and I promised him (*tremulously*) that no matter what came, I would always wear it, so—so I had to keep my promise, you know.

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GLADYS.

Then this is just a tiff?

DOLLY.

Not at all! This is the end of everything! (*Tragically.*) Everything! Why, Gladys, what do you suppose he did?

GLADYS.

What did he do?

DOLLY.

Well, you know that horrid little fox-terrier he's so fond of?

GLADYS.

Blitzen; yes.

DOLLY.

I heard him say, one day, that nothing but death should ever separate him from that dog, so—just for fun—I pretended to take a dislike to the beast, and asked him to give it away, and, Gladys, he refused—point-blank!

GLADYS.

Of course he did!

DOLLY.

Well, I don't see any "of course" about it! I was only in fun at first, but after that, I thought I'd

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find out, once for all, which he cared most for, the dog or me, and—well, I found out! And it wasn't me!

GLADYS.

Dolly Wakelee! You quarrelled with Ted and broke your engagement just because he wouldn't yield to a silly, selfish whim like that?

DOLLY (*with dignity*).

I broke my engagement because I have no intention of marrying a man who would hold me second to his dog! If it had been his horse, I might have endured it—but his dog! (*Under GLADYS'S disapproving glance she grows resentful.*) You don't mean to say that you would have submitted to such treatment!

GLADYS.

When you've had a little more experience, Dolly, and know men better, you'll learn to appreciate——

DOLLY (*pettishly*).

Oh, don't assume any matronly affectations with me, Gladys! You're only two years my senior. And you know perfectly well (*tearfully*) that it was brutal of Ted! Simply brutal! Joe will understand. (*She weeps disconsolately.*)

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GLADYS.

Joe will do nothing of the sort! He'll tell you, as I do, that you're a very silly girl to let a thing like that separate you from a man like Ted Owen, and advise you to apologise at once, before it is too late.

DOLLY.

I apologise? To Ted? Not for anything in the world! Not if he begged me on his bended knees.

GLADYS (*shortly*).

Well, he won't! Ted's not that sort. (*JOE and TED are heard talking outside.*) Here come the men. Let's go upstairs.

DOLLY (*mutinously*).

No, let's don't! I've hardly seen Joe at all.

GLADYS

' (*regarding her with critical deliberation*).

Well, if I were you, I should hardly want to see him in that plight. Your hair is mussed, and your eyes are swollen, and your nose is——

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DOLLY (*furiously*).

Gladys, you're simply horrid to-day!

(*Exit hurriedly to dining-room, followed by
GLADYS.*)

(*Enter JOE and TED from hall, disputing.*)

TED.

But I tell you it was simply a whim, and I wouldn't cast off a good dog for any woman's caprice.

JOE.

If you're going to be as stiff-necked as all that, you'd better get you to a monastery, where you won't have women to deal with! All charming women have whims—if they hadn't, they wouldn't be so charming—and any man ought to be glad to gratify them—when they're not too unreasonable.

TED.

But this *was* too unreasonable!

JOE.

Pooh! Nonsense! I don't blame her in the least. Naturally, she wanted to think she was first in your affections. You should have encouraged her—diplomatically—instead of flying off the handle in that hot-headed fashion.

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TED.

I suppose I should have sent poor old Blitzen to the pound, too?

JOE.

Oh, stuff! She didn't want you to send him to the pound! She merely wanted to be sure that you *would* send him there, if she *should* ask it. Now, you go and apologise at once, before it's too late.

TED.

I? Apologise? Not much!

JOE.

Now, don't be a donkey, Ted!

TED (*stiffly*).

I do apologise to you, however. I have evidently made a grave mistake. I came down here under the impression that I was coming to friends who would understand my position and sympathise with my point of view. I still hope that Gladys will——

JOE.

Gladys will tell you, as I do, that you're making a blooming idiot of yourself, and that you'd better make your peace while you can.

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TED.

Since you entirely fail to grasp the situation, you will pardon me if I do not heed your advice!

(Exit stiffly to hall.)

Enter GLADYS from dining-room.

GLADYS.

Well, of all the silly performances!

JOE.

What's the matter now?

GLADYS.

Dolly has just told me the story of the quarrel.

JOE.

Sheer idiocy, isn't it?

GLADYS.

You know?

JOE.

Yes, Ted told me.

GLADYS.

So foolish!

JOE.

Absolutely senseless!

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GLADYS.

And selfish!

JOE.

That's what I told him.

GLADYS.

I wouldn't have believed it possible.

JOE.

I hope you told her what you thought of it.

GLADYS.

I did that!

JOE.

Ted's in a towering rage with me.

GLADYS.

Ted in a rage? What about?

JOE.

Because I told him plainly that he was an ass, and advised him to go and make his peace on any terms, as soon as she'd let him.

GLADYS.

Advised him to—Joe Terrill! You sympathise with *her*?

A CHRISTMAS CHIME

JOE.

Of course I do! Who wouldn't?

GLADYS.

Well, I wouldn't!

JOE.

You don't mean to say that you think there's any sense in *his* attitude!

GLADYS.

I think he was entirely right. Why should he sacrifice his dear old dog just to satisfy a silly, vain little impulse of hers?

JOE.

On the contrary, if he can't yield gracefully to a trifling little request like that, he'd better not hope to make her happy.

GLADYS.

But it's so senseless! If she had any earthly reason for it——

JOE.

She had her own reason, probably; and if a man's going to stop to find a reason that appeals to *him* for everything a woman asks of him, he'd better remain a bachelor! Dolly has her caprices, of course, but she's very sweet about them.

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GLADYS.

Oh, you men! A pretty, insipid face, with a dimple or two in it, will make putty of the best of you! I'd like to find a man who could be true to a friend, no matter how many pink cheeks beguiled!

JOE.

When you find him, he'll be the husband of a consistent woman.

GLADYS.

Oh, of course! You change your mind; I'm inconsistent! But I want to know what we're going to do with them. Here they are, both under our roof, and the last train's gone. You may humour Dolly if you like, but I refuse to be a party to any of her nonsense, and I shall see that Ted's not slighted, at any rate.

JOE.

My dear girl, Ted's a man and can take care of himself. He has the stable and the grounds and the billiard-room at his disposal, and a little time for uninterrupted reflection will be salutary in his present frame of mind; but Dolly, poor little girl, is in trouble and needs your sympathy.

GLADYS.

Well, she hasn't aroused it to any appreciable extent, as yet!

A CHRISTMAS CHIME

JOE (*persuasively*).

Gladys, you mustn't neglect Dolly. It wouldn't be decent. She's your guest.

GLADYS (*obstinately*).

So is Ted.

Enter DOLLY, hastily, from the hall, carrying a man's hat.

DOLLY (*tragically*).

Whose hat is this?

JOE.

That? Oh, that—that's mine, you know.

DOLLY (*sarcastically*).

And those are your initials, are they? T. J. O. stands for Joseph Corbin Terrill, I suppose?

JOE.

Oh, T. J.—oh, yes, that's—that's Ted's hat, you know.

DOLLY.

And he is here?

JOE

(*looking imploringly at GLADYS, who is stonily silent*).

Why—er—that is—yes, he's here, Dolly, but you needn't see him.

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DOLLY (*to GLADYS*).

And this is what you asked me down here for—to confront me with this man, and subject me to this humiliation! I suppose you thought you could force me to——

JOE (*soothingly*).

No, no, Dolly! Really, we didn't know——

DOLLY (*wrathfully*).

Oh, no, of course you didn't know! I hadn't written to Gladys, explaining it all!

JOE.

But you see, I——

DOLLY.

Oh, this is unendurable! Unfortunately, the last train has gone, but I will remain in my room until there is an opportunity to get away, and I shall be grateful for the privilege of remaining there——
alone! (*Exit to dining-room.*)

GLADYS.

There! You see how sweet and reasonable she is!

Enter TED from hall, carrying a lady's handkerchief.

A CHRISTMAS CHIME

TED (*sternly*).

Whose handkerchief is this?

GLADYS (*smiling confidently*).

That? Oh, that—that's mine, you know.

TED

(*displaying embroidered initials in the corner*).

D. W. stands for Gladys Terrill, does it?

GLADYS.

Oh, well, maybe it *is* Dolly's. She may have left it here.

TED.

I found it in the hall just now, and I caught a glimpse of flying petticoats at the same time. Is she here? In this house?

GLADYS (*laughing nervously*).

Why—what a singular notion, Ted! (*She looks pleadingly at JOE, who regards her with a sardonic smile.*)

TED.

Do me the honour to tell me the truth, if you please. Is she here?

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GLADYS (*weakly*).

Y-yes, but——

TED (*angrily to JOE*).

And this is the reason for your sudden invitation to spend Christmas with you, is it? You thought you'd get me down here where your roof would prove an obligation, and where the lack of transportation facilities would prevent flight, and force me to adopt the course you had laid out for me!

JOE (*wearily*).

My dear fellow, we didn't——

TED.

A very pretty scheme, but you forgot one little detail. "One man may lead a pony to the brink, but twenty thousand cannot make him drink!" Unfortunately, circumstances compel me to accept your hospitality for a few hours longer, but I shall endeavour to encroach upon your other guests as little as possible. (*Exit TED to hall.*)

JOE (*mildly*).

Amiable young man! What girl could refuse an invitation to live with that temper? So gentle! So considerate! So just!

A CHRISTMAS CHIME

GLADYS.

Well, it's all your fault, anyway! If you had given me that letter when it arrived, we might have been spared all this!

JOE.

If you'd take a firm stand with Ted, it would all smooth out now.

GLADYS.

You try taking a firm stand with Dolly.

JOE.

Don't want to. Dolly's all right.

GLADYS.

Oh, of course! Dolly's young and pretty—and she has dimples—so it's not of the least consequence that she has neither right nor reason on her side! That's what it is to belong to the logical sex!

JOE.

But you see, Dolly is——

GLADYS.

Oh, yes, Dolly's this and Dolly's that! One would think, to hear you, that you were more than half in love with Dolly yourself! It's to be regretted that you didn't marry a woman of that type!

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JOE (*in exasperation*).

I did!

GLADYS (*incredulously*).

What?

JOE (*doggedly*).

I did.

GLADYS.

Joseph Terrill! I have forgiven you many things, but this is the last straw! I will never forgive you! *Never!* Moreover, I will have no further connection with this affair. I will go to my room and remain there until *your friend*, Miss Wakelee, has departed! (*Exit GLADYS, furiously, to hall.*)

JOE.

Whew! "Hark, the herald angels sing!" (*Sits, his elbows on his knees, and clasps his head in his hands.*) And this is Christmas Eve!

Enter TED from hall.

TED.

I can't find my hat. Did I leave it——

Enter DOLLY from dining-room.

DOLLY.

Oh, Joe, did I leave my handkerchief——

A CHRISTMAS CHIME

JOE

(*as his guests stare at each other*).

Oh, Lord! (Exit JOE, precipitately.)

TED (*awkwardly*).

Gh—er—how de do?

DOLLY (*nervously*).

Good morn—afternoon.

TED.

Er—nice day. (*Pause.*) You—er—you came down to spend Christmas?

DOLLY.

Yes.

TED.

So did I.

DOLLY.

Ah?

TED.

You don't mind?

DOLLY.

Mind!

TED.

Yes, you—perhaps you'd rather I hadn't come?

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DOLLY (*coldly*).

Well—you're here now, you know.

TED (*dejectedly*).

Yes, so I am!

DOLLY (*suggestively*).

And—I'm here, too.

TED (*brightening*).

That's so!

DOLLY (*nervously, after a pause*).

How—how's Blitzen?

TED (*gruffly*).

Blitzen's *all right!*

DOLLY.

I wish—I wish I had a—a dog.

TED (*eagerly*).

What kind of a dog?

DOLLY (*archly*).

I—I *think* I'd like a—a fox-terrier.

A CHRISTMAS CHIME

TED.

Dolly!

Enter JOE from hall.

JOE

(hastily interposing himself between DOLLY and TED).

Oh, by Jove! Dolly, let's go and take a walk. Wouldn't you like to take a walk? (TED *looks anxious.*)

DOLLY.

No, thanks, not to-night. (TED *looks relieved.*)

JOE.

Don't you want to go to the stable to see the new team? You're so fond of horses. (TED *fidgets.*)

DOLLY.

I? I *hate* horses! (JOE *looks bewildered and TED smiles ecstatically.*)

Enter GLADYS from hall.

GLADYS (*in dismay*).

Oh, good gracious! (*She goes hastily to a small table and takes up a wreath.*) Ted, will you help

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me put up this wreath? We haven't quite finished decorating.

TED

(glancing wistfully at DOLLY).

With pleasure. *(He joins her, while JOE engages DOLLY in conversation.)*

GLADYS.

Thanks so much! *(Quietly to him.)* Poor old Ted! I'm so sorry about this wretched affair! But you may depend upon me to do all I can to help you.

TED.

I'm sure of that, Gladys. *(They continue their conversation, trying the wreath in various positions.)*

JOE *(sympathetically to DOLLY).*

This is pretty hard on you, little girl, but you may count on me to help you through anything! I'll do all I can to make it easier for you. *(DOLLY calls out all her dimples.)*

GLADYS *(hammer in hand).*

Why, of course I can drive a nail! No, I'm going to do it, now, just to show you— *(She pounds her finger and drops the hammer with a wail of pain.)*
Oh, Joe!

A CHRISTMAS CHIME

JOE (*running to her*).

What's the matter, dearie? Did you hurt it much?
Let me see. (*After a perfunctory glance at the
injured finger, TED hastens to DOLLY.*)

TED (*impulsively*).

Dolly, do you mean that I may give Blitzen to you?
(*DOLLY turns away from him, tremulously smiling.*) Do you, Dolly?

DOLLY (*faltering*).

Would you give him to me, Ted?

TED (*very tenderly*).

You know I would! Will you take him, dear?

DOLLY

(*between laughter and tears*).

Why, you dear old dunce, that was what I wanted
you to do all the time! (*TED seizes her hands and,
after one glance toward JOE and GLADYS, kisses
them rapturously. JOE, looking up just in time
to see it, attracts GLADYS'S attention, and they stand
hand in hand, nodding and smiling at the younger
couple.*)

CURTAIN.

*THE COMMITTEE ON
MATRIMONY*

THE COMMITTEE ON
MATRIMONY

A Comedy in One Act

CHARACTERS

Phyllis Arlington.

Robert Chalmers.

A richly furnished, if somewhat conventional, drawing-room serves as a background. Pictures, hangings, rugs, bric-a-brac, books, all indicate that taste and discretion have been exercised in their selection, but it is evident, also, that the family life is lived elsewhere, and that this room, like certain tables in boarding-house dining-rooms, is reserved for transient guests. The chill impression given by the careful exactness of every detail is somewhat modified, however, by the cheery crackle of a wood fire, and by the shaded lights, whose rays soften, even while they illumine, the mathematical precision of the room.

PHYLLIS ARLINGTON, a slender, supple girl, whose dreamy grey eyes, sensitive nostrils, and softly moulded chin bespeak an impressionable nature—an indication somewhat contradicted, it is true, by the firmness of her lips—sits near a table on the left, occasionally taking a few stitches in the embroidery which lies, for the most part, in her lap. The lamp-light, filtering through a daffodil shade, falls upon her white-wool gown and adds a glint to her fair hair, which is neither bright enough to be golden nor dark enough to be brown.

To ROBERT CHALMERS, a vigorous, resolute,

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practical young fellow who lounges among the pillows of a divan on the right, she seems a delectable vision, and his eyes pay constant, eager homage, the while his slower lips temporise to suit her mood.

PHYLLIS (*continuing an argument*).

Well, Kipling may be all that you say, but to me he seems deplorably lacking in delicacy and idealism.

ROBERT.

I fancy that life in India may not be conducive to the development of either of those qualities; but he's keen and direct, with an apparently inexhaustible fund of humour and a command of the English language that is simply marvellous! Moreover, he never goes into mawkish, morbid analysis of the commonplace, nor does he write unhealthy books which—to use his own words—“deal with people's insides from the point of view of men who have no stomachs.”

PHYLLIS (*laughing*).

Rob! You quote Kipling as other people quote the Bible, and you have an appropriate text for any occasion.

ROBERT

(*taking a book from a small table near him*).

Well, one can't open one of his books without finding something worth reading. Listen to this, for

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instance. (*Reads.*) "How can a man who has never married; who cannot be trusted to pick up at sight a moderately sound horse; whose head is hot and upset with visions of domestic felicity, go about the choosing of a wife? He cannot see straight or think straight if he tries; and the same disadvantages exist in the case of a girl's fancies. But when mature, married, and discreet people arrange a match between a boy and a girl, they do it with a view to the future, and the young couple live happily ever afterward. As everybody knows." (*Laughs.*) What a jolly, sarcastic beggar he is!

PHYLLIS.

Does that impress you as being sarcasm?

ROBERT

(*lowering the book to stare at her.*)

Great Scott! Does that impress me as being sarcasm! What else could it be?

PHYLLIS.

Well, I know one can't be too certain of Kipling's opinions, but at any rate, he *might* mean that. Many people would agree with him.

ROBERT

(*returning to the perusal of his book.*)

Humph!

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PHYLLIS.

Now, for instance, that has been for a long time a favourite theory of mine, and if the day ever comes when I care enough for a man to want to marry him I shall refer the matter to a committee of our friends and abide by their decision.

ROBERT

(hotly, throwing the book aside).

Do you mean to say that if you loved a man you would permit any one else to decide for you whether or not you should marry him?

PHYLLIS *(calmly).*

I mean precisely that. I should deem myself prejudiced and consequently unfit to decide so important a question.

ROBERT

(leaning forward and speaking argumentatively).
But, Phyllis, can't you see how absurd it is? The idea of expecting—or permitting—any one else to decide for you a question that concerns you so vitally—a matter so purely personal.

PHYLLIS *(very earnestly).*

That's just the point! It does concern me so vitally that I can't be expected to look at it from a

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rational point of view. I am too near it; I have no perspective. And I'm surprised to hear you speak of marriage as purely a personal matter, Rob.

ROBERT.

But no one else can know your heart, so how——

PHYLLIS (*quickly*).

For that very reason, anybody else's judgment would be better than mine. What right have two people to say: "Because we love each other we will marry, be the consequences what they may"? That kind of love has been well defined as "an egotism of two."

ROBERT (*rising impatiently*).

And in its place you would establish an intellectual companionship which, after it has been investigated and approved by your cold-blooded committee, you will allow to expand—perhaps—into a calm affection. Cupid with a microscope! (*He goes to the fireplace and stands impatiently rubbing his hands before the blaze.*)

PHYLLIS

(*resignedly resuming her embroidery*).

Indeed, you misunderstand me! But Mrs. Treavor says that in questions relating to marriage, people

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think far too much of their own selfish desires, and far too little of the effect of their indulgence upon Humanity.

ROBERT (*drily*).

Did Mrs. Treavor marry to benefit humanity?

PHYLLIS (*sadly*).

No; and she has realised her mistake and suffered bitterly for it.

ROBERT

(*somewhat quizzically, turning toward her*).

Did she tell you that, too?

PHYLLIS.

Oh, no! How can you be so unfair to her, Rob? But one who knows her well can see how bravely she struggles to make the most of what life has left possible for her.

ROBERT

(*standing with his back to the fireplace, hands behind him*).

Well, it's left a good deal. Joe Treavor is one of the straightest, manliest fellows I know.

PHYLLIS (*impatiently*).

Oh, yes, I dare say—from a man's point of view! But so lacking in perception, in—in——

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ROBERT (*bluntly*).

Well, in what?

PHYLLIS.

Oh, in everything that a woman like Mrs. Treavor needs!

ROBERT.

Why, then, did she marry him?

PHYLLIS (*triumphantly*).

That's just it! She *loved* him—and idealised him—and so, of course, she couldn't see that he was of too coarse a fibre to satisfy her soul's needs.

ROBERT (*returning to the divan*).

Her soul fiddlesticks!

PHYLLIS (*indignantly*).

Rob! If you only knew Mrs. Treavor, you'd understand how fine and strong and womanly she is, and what a perpetual sacrifice her life has been.

ROBERT

(*taking up his book again*).

Perhaps I should; and yet—I'm only a man, you know.

PHYLLIS (*quickly*).

Yes, but such a—— (*She stops, in confusion.*)

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ROBERT

(again throwing book aside and going toward her eagerly).

Yes? You were about to say——?

PHYLLIS *(shyly).*

You're so different from other men! So reasonable—so much more sympathetic—so—so—oh, you know!

ROBERT

(standing behind her chair).

Phyllis, am I different enough to—to——

PHYLLIS

(with an effort, faintly).

To what, Rob?

ROBERT *(bending over her).*

To win you, dear? I love you, Phyllis! I know I'm not a poet and I don't understand lots of your theories, but—I love you! *(PHYLLIS hides her face from him. After a pause, he almost whispers:)* Phyllis!

PHYLLIS.

Yes?

ROBERT *(tenderly).*

Are you offended? Why don't you answer me?

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PHYLLIS (*archly*).

Did you ask anything?

ROBERT

(*eagerly taking her hand*).

Don't trifle, dear! I ask everything! Your love—
and you! Do you love me, Phyllis? A little?

PHYLLIS (*softly*).

Yes—a little.

ROBERT.

Phyllis! (*He tries to put his arms about her, but she springs up and eludes him.*) Really—really, you love me?

PHYLLIS

(*keeping a chair between them*).

Really, really, I—love you! (*He moves around the chair and she retreats behind the divan, saying hastily:*) But you must behave very well if you expect me to continue to do so. For example (*he advances; she backs away*), you must not be—greedy!

ROBERT

(*at right of divan, protestingly*).

But, dearest!

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PHYLLIS

(*at left of divan, teasingly*).

Well—dearest?

ROBERT (*pleadingly*).

Phyllis, dear, don't tease—*now!*

PHYLLIS.

Very well; I'll be as serious as you choose, if you'll promise——

ROBERT.

Yes?

PHYLLIS.

To treat me as a prisoner of war and not as—a target!

ROBERT (*reproachfully*).

A prisoner?

PHYLLIS (*very sweetly*).

Have I not surrendered? (*He moves quickly toward her, but as she withdraws he steps back.*)

ROBERT.

Very well; I promise. Come out from behind your fortifications. (*She sits on the divan.*)

PHYLLIS

(*pensively, after a pause*).

I wonder what Mrs. Treavor will say?

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ROBERT (*ardently*).

What matter? I'm content to know what you have said. (*He draws a chair very near her and sits.*)

Phyllis (*persuasively*), when will you marry me?

PHYLLIS (*in alarm*).

Marry you! Oh—why—let's not talk about that!

ROBERT.

Phyllis! What do you mean?

PHYLLIS (*breathlessly*).

Why—you know—there's something to—to consider first.

ROBERT (*bewildered*).

Why, what? What is there? Is anybody's consent required? We're orphans, and of age.

PHYLLIS.

Yes, but I wonder if—if they—will let us—marry?

ROBERT (*still puzzled*).

They? Who in thunder are "they"?

PHYLLIS.

Why, my friends, you know, to whom I must submit the matter.

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ROBERT (*relieved*).

Oh, your people! Why, of course they will! I suppose I must ask your uncle, as a matter of form, for your hand, but that'll be all right! Both he and your aunt know that I love you, and they've been very kind to me.

PHYLLIS.

Oh, Uncle Jerry! Of course he won't object! And if he did, I could coax him out of it in five minutes. Ah! Ah! (*She holds up a warning hand as he moves impulsively toward her and slips away to the farther end of the divan. He sits beside her.*) And Auntie would agree with Uncle Jerry. She always does.

ROBERT.

Well, then, who else is there whom we must consult?

PHYLLIS (*faintly*).

The—the committee.

ROBERT.

The committee! What committee? Surely, Phyllis, you don't intend—you *can't* intend to refer this matter to—oh, pshaw! Of course you don't!

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PHYLLIS (*more firmly*).

But I do, Rob! I must! Don't you see? We're in no position to judge whether our marriage would be best for us—best for Humanity.

ROBERT.

Why aren't we?

PHYLLIS.

Because we love each other. (*As he tries to clasp her in his arms, she shrinks from him.*) No, no, Rob! You mustn't! Indeed, you mustn't, until—until we are certain.

ROBERT (*gravely*).

Aren't you certain now, Phyllis?

PHYLLIS.

That I care, yes—but not that I dare marry you. Our judgment is so warped now by our love for each other that it's impossible for us to be entirely rational. (*She rises, speaking impressively.*) But so much depends upon the wise solution of this problem, not only for us but for society, that we must invoke the aid of earnest, serious minds, and rely absolutely upon their conclusions.

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ROBERT (*quietly, rising also*).

Far be it from me to question the wisdom of the East, but it will be some years, I fancy, before that eminently Oriental idea takes root and flourishes in the Occidental mind. Why, Phyllis, that's the philosophy of India, where happy marriages, as we understand them, are absolutely unknown.

PHYLLIS (*reverently*).

Mrs. Treavor says that no one can estimate the psychic influence of the Home. Its potentiality is limitless; its consequences so far-reaching as to be incalculable; and if the elements combining in its atmosphere are not well balanced, only evil can result.

ROBERT.

But, Phyllis, dear——

PHYLLIS.

She says, too, that only by awakening the cosmic consciousness in man, and a sense of his personal relation to all mental causation, can we hope to establish ideal conditions and become quite free. And so we must enter reverently into the realm of cause and abide by its laws, Rob.

ROBERT (*pacing to and fro*).

How are you going to ascertain all this, Phyllis?

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PHYLLIS (*somewhat reluctantly*).

Well, I suppose one never can be absolutely certain, but (*resuming her seat on the divan*) we must do all we can to find out, mustn't we, Rob?

ROBERT.

Oh, I suppose we must! But——

PHYLLIS.

Just a moment, please. We'll name a committee—two of my friends and two of yours—and they will select a fifth person (ROBERT *dubiously shakes his head*), and then we shall let them decide for us whether or not we are really suited to each other and may marry with reasonable safety.

ROBERT

(*sitting beside her and taking her hand*).

See here, Phyllis, listen to me. You're talking nonsense, dear. No one could decide that as well as we can. (*She vainly tries to withdraw her hand. He continues earnestly.*) You know me well. I have loved you for years, and I have kept nothing back from you that could influence your love for me. You don't doubt that I love you, do you? Do you, Phyllis?

PHYLLIS.

No.

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ROBERT.

Nor my ability to care for you?

PHYLLIS.

Oh, no!

ROBERT.

Then why tantalise me? Say that you'll marry me—soon!

PHYLLIS

(rising, almost crying, and pulling her hand away).

I can't Rob! I can't! It wouldn't be right!

ROBERT *(very gravely).*

You insist upon appointing this absurd committee? Upon laying bare the sweetest, most sacred feeling in our lives, and inviting those people to dissect it, examine it, and pronounce upon its quality?

PHYLLIS *(obstinately).*

I do!

ROBERT *(rising).*

Evidently I have laboured under a grave misapprehension. I gathered the impression, somehow, that you cared for me—that you might even love me.

PHYLLIS *(piteously).*

Oh, I do! I do!

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ROBERT.

Then why in the name of all that's reasonable——

PHYLLIS.

Mrs. Treavor says——

ROBERT.

Hang Mrs. Treavor!

PHYLLIS (*rising*).

Robert!

ROBERT (*bowing stiffly*).

I beg your pardon.

PHYLLIS (*with dignity*).

Mrs. Treavor says that our hearts are dangerously deceptive, and that it's only after we have suffered and suffered that we dare trust to their impulses.

ROBERT.

And so you are making me “suffer and suffer” that you may be certain of me. Is that it?

PHYLLIS (*simply*).

No, dear. But I know so little of sorrow—my life has been so smooth and so happy—and we have been

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so—so happy—together—that I can't trust myself. And I must know that I'm doing you no wrong before I promise to marry you.

ROBERT

(stepping quickly to her side and taking her hands).

Dear little woman, how could you do me a wrong?

PHYLLIS *(gently)*.

You don't seem to understand, Rob, that there are very grave ethical responsibilities to consider. And then, we've said nothing yet of the effect of the subconscious mind which, when it is untrained as *(hesitatingly)*—as yours is, dear—may exert a very baleful influence. Some one has said that there are a great many very excellent people who are not at all excellent for each other, and we may be among them.

ROBERT *(positively)*.

Well, we're not! However, I suppose I must submit, though I think it's arrant nonsense—and worse. It's sacrilegious!

PHYLLIS.

Oh, Rob!

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ROBERT.

But we'll be even that, if it pleaseth my lady. Come, we'll sit here and select our committee (*she permits herself to be led to the divan, where they sit*); and—oh, I say! You must let me keep possession of that hand, you know, as a sort of—er—retaining fee, to quiet my scruples about this jury business. So! Now, you begin.

PHYLLIS.

I'll name one, and then you name one.

ROBERT (*kissing her hand*).

All right. Fire away!

PHYLLIS.

Mrs. Treavor.

ROBERT (*protestingly*).

Now, see here, Phyllis, that's hardly fair! Mrs. Treavor belongs to the ultra-anti-masculine wing of the woman movement, and opposes marriage on principle. She is, no doubt, an excellent woman, but——

PHYLLIS (*fervently*).

She's a noble woman, Rob, with such profound soul-depth!

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ROBERT.

H'm! Well—I'm not so sure about the soul-depth, girlie. She doesn't seem to have soul-depth enough to appreciate her husband, who is one of the finest, cleanest, most all-round good fellows I've ever known—and I know him well. She doesn't seem to have soul-depth enough to realise that that puny, spindle-legged boy of hers needs more of her attention than her clubs and classes. She doesn't seem to feel (*ROBERT warms as he proceeds, and PHYLLIS withdraws her hand*) that her husband and son are freezing to death in the extremely rarefied atmosphere of the home that she ought to make warm and cheery and wholesome, while she floats about in a transcendental haze, lecturing to a lot of sentimental women (*PHYLLIS indignantly rises and crosses to the other side of the room*) about how to satisfy the "soul hunger" of humanity—humanity with a capital H!

PHYLLIS (*coldly*).

I knew that you couldn't be just to Mrs. Treavor, Rob, but I didn't expect you to be brutal. She is my dearest friend; the woman upon whose judgment I most rely.

ROBERT

(*springing up and excitedly pacing to and fro*).

Yes, and she's the woman who's responsible for all

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this foolishness! She fancies herself misunderstood and unappreciated, and prates about her wasted life; she inveighs against men and against marriage, and teaches good, sweet, sensible girls like you to believe that you can't trust to the promptings of your own pure hearts——

PHYLLIS.

But, Rob, list——

ROBERT.

And that there's something in her hazy, remote, bloodless philosophy that will atone to you for the sacrifice of your sacred human yearning for love and all that it brings to a woman! I know her kind, confound 'em, and they're all dangerous!

PHYLLIS

(with freezing dignity).

You forget yourself, Robert! We are not discussing Mrs. Treavor. She is my choice for one member of our committee. *(She crosses the room with stately tread.)*

ROBERT

(pausing in his walk for a moment).

You will not withdraw her name, Phyllis?

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PHYLLIS (*coldly*).

Certainly not.

(*She returns to the seat she first occupied, near the lamp, and makes a pretence of continuing her embroidery, but her glance furtively follows him. He resumes his impatient walk. Of a sudden he pauses behind her chair, his eyes widen and brighten with an illuminating thought; he puckers up his lips as if to whistle, throws back his head in a silent laugh, and then, again reducing his features to gravity, crosses slowly to the divan and throws himself once more among its pillows.*)

ROBERT (*deliberately*).

Very well, I accept Mrs. Treavor—though I don't like her (PHYLLIS *prepares to be affable again*), and I'll name—er—let me see—Duncan Graham!

PHYLLIS (*in consternation*).

Rob!

ROBERT

(*in a tone of mild surprise*).

Well?

PHYLLIS (*indignantly*).

That crusty old bachelor?

ROBERT (*judicially*).

Why not? Man of excellent judgment, Graham. Scotch, you know. So cool and hard-headed.

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PHYLLIS.

Pig-headed, you mean!

ROBERT.

And eminently modern, I should say.

PHYLLIS (*with heat*).

Yes, too modern! He seems to regard married men as victims of untoward circumstance, and he *congratulates* engaged girls! Horrid old thing!

ROBERT (*with quiet dignity*).

Phyllis, you are speaking of a man for whom I have the greatest admiration.

PHYLLIS

(*very erect, two bright spots of colour burning in her cheeks*).

I don't care! He *is* horrid! Why, Rob, he'll make no end of a fuss!

ROBERT.

A fuss?

PHYLLIS.

Yes; he'll be sure to raise a lot of objections. He thought Will Forbes was so foolish to marry Mollie Turner, and she's such a sweet, dear girl, too!

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ROBERT (*with amusement*).

Yes, I know. He even tried to argue Forbes out of the notion, and when he failed he said that the worst of congenital idiocy was its hopelessness.

PHYLLIS (*indignantly*).

I don't see anything funny about that! I suppose he'll go about saying that you're a congenital idiot, too! He told me at the Terry's dinner the other night that he thought you had a great future before you, if (*with withering scorn*) you didn't marry too soon. And then he quoted that silly old saw, "A young man married is a man that's marred." Spiteful old thing!

ROBERT (*to himself*).

The deuce he did! Bull's-eye, by Jove. (*To her, carelessly:*) Yes, I know that to be his opinion. That's the reason I chose him. You know, Graham sees so clearly all the obstacles that matrimony puts in a man's way—the added responsibility (*counting them off deliberately on his fingers*), the loss of personal liberty, the petty social duties, the possible—er—nagging, the narrowed horizon, the contracted environment, the curtailed opportunities, the——

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PHYLLIS (*hysterically, rising*).

You needn't go on, Mr. Chalmers! I've heard quite enough! I wouldn't for anything in the world entail such sacrifice upon you!

ROBERT (*mildly*).

My dear little girl, how excitable you are!

PHYLLIS

(*sits suddenly, tapping on the table with her fingertips*).

I am not your dear little girl! And I'm not in the least excited!

ROBERT.

But, Phyllis, be calm a moment and listen to reason.

PHYLLIS

(*again springing to her feet*).

Reason! Reason! That's like a man! You all care so much more for what you call "reason," and for practical, sordid considerations than you do for our happiness! (*Turns her back upon him.*)

ROBERT (*suppressing a smile*).

But I understood that this committee was to be formed for eminently practical purposes, to sug-

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gest and consider the objections to our marriage that we couldn't be expected, under the circumstances, to discover.

PHYLLIS (*over her shoulder*).

You seem to have no difficulty in discovering them!

ROBERT.

But Graham could think of so many more! You see, he's not hampered by his love for you. (PHYLLIS *sniffs disdainfully*. ROBERT *lazily leans back among the cushions*.) Now, that's settled. Who's your next candidate?

PHYLLIS

(*turning upon him suddenly*).

Do I understand that you will not withdraw Duncan Graham's name?

ROBERT.

Certainly I'll not. Why should I?

PHYLLIS.

You want that crabbed, dyspeptic, pessimistic, stubborn, detestable old Scotchman making his cynical comments on—on our love for each other?

THE COMMITTEE ON MATRIMONY

ROBERT

(slowly rising and moving toward her, speaking solemnly and impressively).

But you remember that Mrs. Treavor says that love between a man and a woman is, of itself, an insurmountable subjective obstacle, evanescent in its very nature, and paralysing to the conversation of soul energy; and that only when these subjective distortions are cast aside, and the higher potentialities of the spirit are educed, can the submerged mentality become transcendently greater in scientific idealism, and the ego, vibrating to a dominant note in the thought-atmosphere, become a finited spirit, potentially whole. *(To himself, ruefully:)* I'm afraid I got that mixed!

PHYLLIS

(who has been staring at him in amazement and consternation, runs past him and throws herself, weeping, upon the divan).

Oh, Rob! Rob! Rob!

(Impulsively, he starts to comfort her, but checks himself, shakes his head, thrusts his hands resolutely into his trousers' pockets, and stands looking down at her.)

COMEDIES IN MINIATURE

ROBERT (*very tenderly*).

Phyllis, shall we give up this idea? Shall we put our faith in our love for each other and—(*smiling slightly*) chance it?

PHYLLIS

(*rising, wrathful, tearful, defiant*).

No! No! No! We *can't* give it up! But you must withdraw Duncan Graham. I will not have him on that committee! You understand, Rob?

ROBERT

(*thoughtfully, to himself*).

Now for one big, brutal bluff! (*He turns toward her, speaking sternly.*) Phyllis, listen to me. I have yielded thus far to your folly because I hoped you'd see the absurdity of your position. (*She makes an imperious gesture, which he ignores.*) Your conduct shows me that my hope is vain. Now we'll decide this question at once, if you please. You know that I love you. You know what my circumstances are, financially and socially, and what your position as my wife would be. You say that you love me. If you love me, you'll marry me. (*He takes out his watch.*) I will give you five minutes in which to decide whether or not you'll marry

THE COMMITTEE ON MATRIMONY

me within three months. If, at the end of five minutes, you have not decided, I shall go away—and I shall not return. (PHYLLIS *is defiant.*) . . . One minute. (PHYLLIS *taps her foot and clasps and unclasps her hands.*) . . . Two minutes. (PHYLLIS *fumbles for her handkerchief.*) . . . Three minutes. (PHYLLIS *furtively wipes her eyes.*) . . . Four minutes. (PHYLLIS *drops among the pillows and weeps.*) . . . Five minutes! (He closes the watch with a snap and returns it to his pocket.) Phyllis (*tenderly*), will you marry me? (PHYLLIS *sobs. After a slight pause, ROBERT walks rapidly to the door, where he turns and looks back at her.*) Phyllis? . . . Good night. (Exit ROBERT.)

(As soon as the curtain falls behind him, PHYLLIS sits up, listens to his departing steps, and springs to her feet.)

PHYLLIS (*calling*).

Rob! Rob! Oh, Rob! (As he appears in the doorway, she retreats a few steps.)

ROBERT (*politely*).

You called? (She nods and sobs.) You wished to say?

COMEDIES IN MINIATURE

PHYLLIS

(faintly, struggling with her sobs).

I'll—I'll withdraw—Mrs. Treavor's—name—from that—that committee,—if—if you'll withdraw——

ROBERT.

Well?

PHYLLIS.

If you'll withdraw—Duncan Graham's.

ROBERT *(entering)*.

Oh, well, that's fair. Of course I will. But, really, *(slowly drawing nearer to her)*, I don't see the need of any other committee, if—if—if *we*——

PHYLLIS

(beaming, expectant, joyous).

Why, neither do I, you old goose!

(She stretched out her hands to him, and as he moves toward her with extended arms——)

QUICK CURTAIN.

HER NEIGHBOUR'S CREED

HER NEIGHBOUR'S CREED

A Sketch

*“ Nor knowest thou what argument
Thy life to thy neighbour's creed hath lent.”*

—EMERSON.

The Hunters' library is a cosy room, filled with old mahogany and rare brasses, Indian baskets and Oriental rugs, couches, easy-chairs, and many long, low bookcases. Most of the room is in shadow, but the rays of the reading-lamp fall upon MR. HUNTER, smoking behind his newspaper, and less directly upon MRS. HUNTER, who plays with the Maltese kitten lying in her lap. The tone of her soft grey gown is warmed by the pink glow of the lamp, and her pretty, fair hair seems surrounded by a rosy halo.

HE (*looking over his newspaper*).

By the way, dearie, I met Torrence on the car to-day, and they want us to come out there to dinner to-morrow night. He said Alice would 'phone you this evening.

SHE (*raising her brows*).

To-morrow night? Why, Dick, to-morrow will be Good Friday!

HE.

Oh, will it? Well?

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SHE.

Well, of course, I can't go.

HE.

Why not? Something else on hand?

SHE.

Dick! As if I'd go anywhere except to church on Good Friday!

HE (*rather blankly*).

Oh! Well, but see here, Polly, why can't you go to church in the morning?

SHE (*primly*).

I intend to.

HE.

Well, that won't interfere with our going to the Torrences' in the evening. You see, they've planned——

SHE.

Of course, Dick, we couldn't expect Will and Alice to consider the day at all. They were both born and reared Unitarians, you know——

HE.

So was I.

HER NEIGHBOUR'S CREED

SHE (*sighing*).

Yes, I know; so, naturally, none of you thought about it's being Good Friday. But I couldn't think of going out to dine. Indeed, I shouldn't dream of going anywhere except, as I say, to church.

HE

(*disappearing behind his newspaper*).

Oh!

(*A pause ensues, during which the kitten is encouraged to bite his own tail fiercely. When she speaks again, her tone is so casual that not even a married woman would suspect that the excellent dinner just finished, and her unusually dainty toilet, were carefully studied preliminaries to her statement.*)

SHE.

Oh, Dick! Invitations came to-day for the Pattersons' reception on the 29th.

HE

(*clouding his newspaper in smoke*).

Yes?

SHE (*definitely*).

And of course we'll go.

COMEDIES IN MINIATURE

HE (*without enthusiasm*).

Yes, I suppose so.

SHE.

So, on my way home from church this morning, I stopped at Grover's and bought a new gown. I must have one, you know.

HE (*absently*).

Yes, of course.

SHE.

I met Charlotte Houghton there, and, as usual, she was gorgeously dressed. She had on that green gown with gold trimmings. Such bad taste for Lenten wear!

HE (*looking over his paper*).

Charlotte's pretty. Probably sackcloth doesn't suit her complexion.

SHE.

Oh, as to that—of course, one needn't be a guy! But gold trimmings! You know (*pensively*), I've worn only greys and purples all through Lent. There was that lovely red cloth of mine lying there, too, but I simply couldn't wear it, you know, in Lent!

HE

(*absorbed in the market reports*).

No, I suppose not.

HER NEIGHBOUR'S CREED

SHE (*enthusiastically*).

But I'm going to have the dearest gown for Easter!
I'm going for the last fitting to-morrow.

HE

(*suddenly peering over the paper again*).

Eh? I thought you said——

SHE.

And the loveliest hat! That came home to-day,
but it wasn't quite right, so I sent it back, and I'll
slip in to Miss Benner's to-morrow and show her
what I want done with it.

HE (*gravely*).

But, Polly, to-morrow will be Good Friday!

SHE.

Well?

HE.

And you're going nowhere except to church, you
know.

SHE.

Oh, Dick, don't be stupid!

HE.

But you said——

SHE.

I said I couldn't go out to dinner. Of course I did!

COMEDIES IN MINIATURE

HE (*slowly*).

Oh, I see. You're garbed in sackcloth and crowned with ashes, but you can go to the dressmaker's and the milliner's and gloat over the flesh-pots in anticipation. Is that it?

SHE (*protestingly*).

Not at all! I suppose you think it's fun to have a gown fitted!

HE.

Oh, then, this is a new form of penance? (*He smiles whimsically.*) Expensive enough to be popular, too, I should say. What else are you going to do to-morrow?

SHE.

Well, I must go to Dixon's and get something for Elsie Bidwell. You know she sent me a vinaigrette on Valentine's Day, and I didn't send her a thing. I want to have the mirror I got for mamma marked, too; and I haven't anything yet for Tom or Rob. It's so hard to get things for men.

HE.

Why give them anything?

SHE.

Why, for Easter! Dick Hunter, I have to explain to you every single year that it's the custom to send one's friends Easter greetings!

HER NEIGHBOUR'S CREED

HE.

But since Easter commemorates the Resurrection, I thought one sent flowers and fresh young plants and—er—you know; that sort of thing.

SHE

(with what, in a less refined woman, would be a sniff).

Oh, of course, if one wishes just barely to notice people! But everybody in our set sends silver.

HE

(in a puzzled tone, screening his twinkling eyes with his hand).

Oh, do they? Purified by fire, I suppose, and all that. But I don't quite see the connection.

SHE *(vaguely)*.

I'm sure I don't know.

HE.

I suppose there must be some remote and forgotten symbolism——

SHE *(hastily)*.

Oh, well, never mind! You're always hunting for impossible things! Dick, I asked the Caruthers to dine here Sunday.

COMEDIES IN MINIATURE

HE (*turning to the editorial page*).
Caruthers? That's good! They're going to be at
Torrence's to-morrow night.

SHE.

Oh, are they? They're Unitarians, too, aren't they?

HE.

I don't know. Guess not. Then they're all going
to hear Treboni.

SHE

(*in a tone eloquent of surprise*).

Treboni!

HE.

Yes; she gives one concert, you know, on her way
back from the Pacific Coast.

SHE (*wistfully*).

Only one?

HE (*cheerfully*).

That's all.

SHE.

Oh, dear! . . . Did they want us to go, Dick?

HER NEIGHBOUR'S CREED

HE.

Yes; Torrence has a lôge.

SHE.

Well, why didn't you tell me?

HE.

You said you couldn't go.

SHE.

I know; but you might, at least, have told me what I was refusing! How stupid of her to be here on Good Friday! (*Another pause, during which the kitten plaintively mews, as is the manner of kittens when their ears are tweaked.*) Oh—er—Dick?

HE

(*deeply interested in the editorial.*)

H'm?

SHE.

That isn't going to be a sacred concert, I suppose?

HE.

Guess not. Haven't heard anything about it.

SHE (*tentatively*).

Of course, nobody will go.

COMEDIES IN MINIATURE

HE.

Oh, I don't know. Torrence said the seats were selling well.

SHE (*impatiently*).

Oh, yes, of course! But I mean—nobody in our set.

HE.

There are the Torrences and the Caruthers!

SHE.

Yes, but—they aren't really in the set, you know. Of course, we *know* them, and the men are your friends, but—Alice and Rose don't—don't——

HE

(*a hint of sarcasm in his tone*).

Don't attend the Church of St. Simeon Stylites?

SHE

(*with spirit, pushing the kitten from her lap as she rises*).

Well, you know perfectly well that all the nicest people go there! The people one must know; that is, if—if one's going to be anybody! And one must consider one's children!

HER NEIGHBOUR'S CREED

HE

(as one who has unexpectedly solved an abstruse problem).

O-oh! All this is really a new form of maternal solicitude, is it?

SHE.

Well, of course, I want him to grow up knowing the right people.

HE (*drily*).

H'm! Yes, I see. But judging from the young man's definite and original ideas as to the "time to keep silence and the time to speak"—he lifted his voice at five o'clock this morning, to my personal knowledge!—and—well, the proprieties governing his conduct generally, I fancy he'll choose his own friends when the time comes!

SHE.

All the more reason that he should be properly started! One never entirely shakes off the influences of one's childhood, you know.

HE.

Which, since your people were Quakers, accounts for your devotion to St. Simeon Stylites, I suppose?

COMEDIES IN MINIATURE

(This, being manifestly irrelevant, is very properly ignored, and he resumes his interrupted reading, while she restlessly wanders about the room.)

SHE (*suddenly*).

Oh, Dick, I wished we lived in England!

HE.

Do you?

SHE.

Yes; because there they close all the theatres and things on Good Friday. . . . Dick?

HE.

Yes?

SHE.

Do you know what Treboni is going to sing?

HE.

No; Torrence didn't say. The usual thing, I suppose.

SHE (*disconsolately*).

I don't see why she didn't call it a sacred concert. It would have made it so easy! That would have been fine, wouldn't it, Dick?

HER NEIGHBOUR'S CREED

HE.

Very.

SHE

(returning to her hassock near the fireplace).

I wonder if people will dress much?

HE.

Well, I hope they'll dress more than they did the last time she was here! Old Mrs. Loomis's lack of apparel was scandalous!

SHE *(picking up the kitten again).*

Oh, you know what I mean! Don't you suppose they'll wear very quiet, dark things?

HE.

Don't know, I'm sure.

SHE *(poking the fire).*

Oh, dear! I would so love to go—if it weren't Good Friday, of course! . . . You said Alice intended to 'phone me to-night?

HE.

That's what Torrence said.

SHE.

What did you tell him?

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HE.

Told him I thought we'd go.

SHE (*reproachfully*).

Oh, Dick!

HE (*contritely*).

I'm sorry, dear; but I forgot all about Good Friday.
You can tell her about it.

SHE.

Yes, but—oh, I suppose I must! (*She thrusts the poker back into the rack with a clatter that sends the kitten leaping away.*) You think I ought to, don't you, Dick?

HE.

Ought to what?

SHE.

Tell her we can't go.

HE (*gravely*).

You must do as you think best about that, Polly. I don't want you to do anything that you think is wrong.

SHE (*persistently*).

But you do want to go, don't you?

HER NEIGHBOUR'S CREED

HE (*smiling at her*).

Oh, it would be very jolly, of course. Torrence and Caruthers and the girls are all pleasant, and they'll have a jolly time; but I shouldn't enjoy it if I knew you were being scourged by your conscience.

SHE (*sighing*).

No, of course not. (*She takes up a newspaper, and for a few minutes is still.*) Oh, here's the programme! . . . Dick, she's going to sing the Bach-Gounod "Ave Maria." That's sacred. And Elizabeth's Prayer from "Tannhäuser." Why, it's going to be a sacred concert, after all!

HE.

What else will she sing?

SHE (*carelessly*).

Oh, some French songs and—other things.

HE.

Call those sacred?

SHE.

Oh, well, one needn't listen to the words, you know. Probably no one will understand them, anyway—and the music's good. Fine music's always sacred, isn't it? You know ever so many arias from the operas are sung in church, with sacred words. And if one didn't listen to the French—or just

COMEDIES IN MINIATURE

thought sacred words to one's self—I don't see why one mightn't go.

(There is another long pause, during which she studies the fire, and he, smiling behind the screen of his newspaper, watches her.)

SHE (*thoughtfully*).

And one might wear black, you know—my jetted net would do—and no jewels. What do you think, Dick?

HE

(after feigning a yawn to conceal the smile that threatened to betray him).

You must do as you think best, dear.

SHE.

I suppose, if I asked them, the girls would wear dark gowns. And you'd be so disappointed to miss it, wouldn't you, dear?

HE (*obtusely*).

Don't consider me at all, Polly. I've heard Treboni several times, you know——

SHE.

Well, but I haven't! That is (*hurriedly*), I haven't any right to be selfish about it. One must sacrifice even one's scruples at times, I suppose. And

HER NEIGHBOUR'S CREED

I'll send some lilies— How much are lilies now, Dick?

HE (*biting his lip*).

I haven't priced them, but somebody said they were very expensive this year.

SHE (*with enthusiasm*).

Then I'll send a lot of lilies to St. Simeon's— enough to go all the way around the chancel! And—I needn't eat very much dinner.

HE.

Then you're going?

SHE.

Well—it's almost a sacred concert, you know. Besides, nobody whom we know will see us, anyway, except the Caruthers and the Torrences, and they don't care.

HE.

The Sewells are going.

SHE.

The Sewells! The *Ellery* Sewells? Why, Dick Hunter! Why didn't you say so in the first place! If the Sewells are there, nobody will say a word.

COMEDIES IN MINIATURE

HE.

There's the telephone bell. What are you going to tell Alice?

SHE.

Tell her? Why, we'll go, of course! I wouldn't miss it for anything!

CURTAIN.

UNEXPECTED GUESTS

UNEXPECTED GUESTS

Now, Eleanore, if you can't keep out of the way, you run right upstairs and play. I can't have you hanging to my skirts while I'm getting luncheon. Well, Katie's washing, you know. No, of course you can't go where Katie is. She's cross enough now, goodness knows! Here she comes! Now, you run right out of the kitchen.

I've just come out (*apologetically*) to make a cup of tea, Katie. I'll have some bread and butter and tea for luncheon, and Eleanore can have bread and milk. No bread! Why, Katie! Oh, yes, of course! I forgot that we had a chafing-dish supper last night. Yes, you're quite right; it takes a great deal of bread to make toast. Of course you couldn't be expected to foresee emergencies like that. Oh, well, we'll eat crackers. And I'll get some jam.

Eleanore, what are you doing? Come right out of the pantry. Why, Eleanore Pelham! Look what you've done! What is that? Molasses? All over Katie's clean shelves! You naughty girl!

COMEDIES IN MINIATURE

Never mind, Katie, I'll clean it up. Yes, I know; you're busy with the washing. Mercy! There's the door-bell! Just twelve o'clock. Must be a pedlar. I can't go, and you—oh, no, of course I never expect you to answer the bell on wash-day, Katie. Eleanore, *you* go to the door, and say that I'm busy and that I don't want anything. And don't stand talking to the man, but shut the door at once. Then go upstairs and wait until I come. Do you understand?

I'm very sorry about the molasses, Katie, but I'll clean it all up. Oh, well, little people don't always realise what trouble they are making, you know. Oh, yes, I shall punish her, certainly. You may go back to the laundry. I'll attend to this and get luncheon. Ugh! Of all the sticky messes!

What? Ladies! At this hour? Let me see, Eleanore. Mrs. James Norton Enderby! My land! I asked her to come to luncheon any day that she happened to be in town—and she's come! *What?* You told her—Eleanore Gladys Pelham! Did you tell that lady that I was busy and didn't want anything? Well, you'll go straight to bed! Now stop your whimpering this instant! I've no time for any nonsense of that sort! And it's wash-day! And Katie's perfectly savage! And there's not a slice of bread in the house! And all this horrid mess in the pantry! Two ladies, did you

UNEXPECTED GUESTS

say? Oh, well, she can't intend to stay, then. I'll just leave this until she's gone.

Oh, how do you do, Mrs. Enderby? So delighted to see you! Your sister? Not your sister *Florence*, whom you have told me so much about? Oh, so *charmed* to meet you, Miss Johnson! Why, certainly, Mrs. Enderby! So nice of you to understand that I should want to meet her at once! No, I won't make a bit of fuss. Just what we should have ourselves, you know. Let me take your wraps. It's so delightful to have you drop in in this informal way! Eleanore and I are often quite lonely. Yes, my little girl. Oh, did she? How *dreadful* of her! I told her once to say something like that to a miserable book-agent whom I saw coming, and she's never forgotten it. Children have such unfathomable memories! Now, will you amuse yourselves for a moment, while I put away your wraps and tell my maid to lay some extra plates? Oh, no, not the least in the world! That's one thing that my maids always understand from the first—that there shall be no complaints about unexpected guests. Oh, yes, it requires a little firmness and tact in the beginning, but they can always be trained, and I simply will not be a slave to my cook!

Oh, dear, what shall I do? I've got to tell Katie! If— Well, there's no help for it! Katie! Oh, Katie! Come here a moment, please. Some ladies

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have just come and— Oh, I'm very sorry, Katie, but really, I can't help it!—and we've got to give them something to eat. Well, you see, it's very important because—oh, well, I haven't time to explain now, but there are reasons why I *must* be nice to Mrs. Enderby. Now what can you give us for luncheon? But, Katie, I can't get it now! You may leave the rest of the washing. Well, then, I'll send it out. Katie (*firmly*), you must get us some lunch! I don't know what, but I've got to go back in the other room, and you are to get luncheon. You understand, Katie! Why, give us the cold chicken that was left from yesterday's dinner. *Gone!* Impossible! There was almost a whole one left when it came off the table. I noticed it particularly, and thought it would do for dinner to-night, with a little stretching. Oh, certainly, Katie, I haven't the least objection to your having everything that you need to eat, but a whole chick— Oh, well, never mind! But get us something! I know there's no bread, but isn't it almost time for the baker? Oh, well, we can't wait until half-past two, you know. That is nonsense. You must make some hot biscuits, only be quick!

Why, Eleanore, are you here entertaining the ladies? I'm afraid you are bothering Miss Johnson. Not everybody likes to have little girls leaning on them. Oh, she's been showing you her kindergarten

UNEXPECTED GUESTS

things, has she? Yes, we think she has rather an unusual adaptability for that sort of thing. We hope she's going to be an artist. Her teacher thinks she shows great talent. Eleanore, can you tell Miss Johnson about Mrs. Pussy? Oh, I think you can! Come, come, now, don't be naughty! Tell Miss Johnson about Mrs. Pussy, and then mamma'll give you some candy. Stand right here by mamma. Take your finger out of your mouth!—so. Now begin. "Mrs. Pussy, sleek and fat—" "—kittens four." That's right! "Went to sleep—" Go on, dear. "By the kitchen—*door*." That's right! Yes, she's only five, you know! Now the next verse, dearie. Oh, yes! Come, now, go right on! "Mrs. Pussy heard—" "—in glee." Yes; go on. "Kittens, maybe—" "—go and see." Yes, we think she has a very remarkable memory. Her teacher says she remembers these things better than any other child in the class. Now, Eleanore! "Creeping, creeping—" Oh, have you forgotten it? You knew it so well yesterday! "But the little mouse had gone—" Why, Eleanore Pelham! What's this on your dress? Molasses! Oh—er—yes, I forgot! Will you excuse me a moment while I go and—er—scrub this small girl? Come, Eleanore.

Now you go straight up the back stairs to your

COMEDIES IN MINIATURE

play-room, and stay there until I come. Don't come down again, Eleanore. Do you understand? I'll come when I have cleaned up the molasses you spilled all over the pantry!

Why, Katie! Why aren't you getting luncheon? Well, I told you to make biscuits. Yes, I know there's molasses all over the pantry—I'm very sorry about that, Katie!—but can't you make biscuits on the kitchen-table this once? Well, but we must have something to eat! It's one o'clock now! Katie! Leave me—*now?* Oh, you can't! You—you *mustn't!* I know! It was very thoughtless of Mrs. Enderby to come on Monday—stupid thing she is, anyway!—and I ought not to have given her that sort of an invitation! But if you'll stay and serve luncheon, I'll—I'll give you that new silk petticoat of mine! It's just about long enough for you. No, you needn't cook *anything!* We'll have—let me see!—is there any boned chicken in the house? I mean canned chicken, you know! Well, if you'll open a can of that, I'll cream it in the chafing-dish, and— No, you needn't make biscuits! I'll serve it on toasted crackers. If you'll set the table, Katie, and toast the crackers, and open the chicken, and serve the luncheon, I'll wash the dishes—and give you that silk petticoat—and—yes, and a whole day off! To-morrow? Yes, the ironing can wait. Well,

UNEXPECTED GUESTS

then, I'll have some one come in and do it. Now, that's a good girl, Katie! A-a-ah!

Yes, we went to hear her last night. Do you think she's as attractive in this rôle as she was in "The Prisoner of Zenda"? Oh, well, perhaps I wasn't in a very responsive mood. Oh, no, not in the least, Mrs. Enderby! Indeed, I'm going to take you at your word, and give you a picked-up luncheon—just what we should have had ourselves, you know. But on Mondays we always have luncheon rather late—in fact, we have it *quite* late. I hope you don't mind? Yes, I have a very satisfactory maid—as maids go. Of course, she needs a little managing, but I really think I have a way with servants. I really have. I seldom have much trouble with them, until they get perfectly unendurable, and then—I simply dismiss them, you know. Have you heard about poor Mrs. Drayton? She tried to dismiss her cook last week, and the woman drove her out of the kitchen by throwing things at her—anything within her reach, you know! Poor Mrs. Drayton was so upset, she had to send for the doctor and a policeman. Now, if I had a maid who was given to throwing things about, I should— Good gracious! what's that? Excuse me a moment!

Oh, you dropped the chafing-dish, Katie? They are slippery things. I dropped one once myself.

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Anything broken? No, I think it's all right. Have you the crackers ready to toast? Here's the chicken—butter—cream—flour—olives—yes, I think that's all. Oh, did you fill the lamp—the alcohol-lamp under the chafing-dish? Never mind; I'll do it. And tea, jam, and little cakes for dessert. All ready, Katie? Yes, you shall have the petticoat this afternoon, just as I promised you.

Won't you come out to luncheon, ladies?

THE P. A. I. L. W. R.

THE P. A. I. L. W. R.

Is this Mrs. Brastow? Yes, good morning, Mrs. Brastow. I thought I couldn't be mistaken. What a charming location you have here! I was in this city when Mr. Brastow bought this lot. I said then that it was an ideal site for a home, and I see it is. And an ideal home on the site. No, I've never had the pleasure of meeting you before, but I've had many a long talk with your husband during the past fifteen years. Oh, yes, I know Mr. Brastow well. You may have heard him speak of me. Jones is my name. Charlie Jones. Yes, I know him well. Thank you, I will come in for a moment.

What a lovely room, to be sure! Such a sense of restfulness pervades it! How one does feel the individuality of a room, Mrs. Brastow! And I suppose everything in your house is as perfect, in its way, as this room is.

There can be only one thing necessary to complete it, and that one thing I shall now have the pleasure of introducing to you. It is the Patent Adjustable Indestructible Loop Wire Receptacle—sometimes called the P. A. I. L. W. R., for short—capable of being transformed, at a moment's notice, and with-

COMEDIES IN MINIATURE

out the aid of any other tool or instrument except the human hand, into any one of twenty-three separate and distinct household articles, each one absolutely indispensable to the well-regulated and adequately equipped home. For example, as you see it now, it is a fruit-dish. Piled high with oranges and bananas, it is a most artistic and beautiful centrepiece for any table. You will notice that the wires are all plated with a patented composition, invented especially for this article, which makes them look like the finest spun silver. This plate is permanent and will never wear off. Like everything else used in the composition of the Patent Adjustable Indestructible Loop Wire Receptacle, it is absolutely indestructible. Just picture to yourself a dining-table with this magnificent article as a centrepiece.

You never eat fruit? Is it possible! I had a brother who had a similar taste. I've known him to leave the table because he was unable to bear the sight of a plate of ripe fruit. On one occasion he broke up a dinner-party by so doing, because he was the fourteenth guest, and, of course, when he left—well, you've heard of that little superstition of thirteen at table. Ah? Well, neither am I. I believe I have no superstitions—unless, indeed, it's the one about pins. "See a pin and pick it up," you know. I never fail to pick up a pin, and it al-

THE P. A. I. L. W. R.

ways brings me good luck. I picked up one on your step, while I was waiting for the door to be opened.

By the way, talking about pins, by compressing this wonderful article, thus, it becomes a pin-tray, an article indispensable to every well-appointed dressing-table. Ah? You use silver pin-trays. Well, of course, many ladies are fortunate enough to be supplied with them now, but one never knows when thieves may break in and steal, you know. And then, one is liable to run up against an emergency, such as unexpected guests from the country, who have to be accommodated in improvised bed-rooms—bed-lounges, and that sort of thing—and, of course, a conscientious hostess always likes to be equal to the occasion. Now, with a number of these marvellous articles in the house, a complete toilet-set, lacking only the brush and mirror, may be had at a moment's notice. This, as I have said, is the pin-tray. Now, you slip this loop, turn it thus, pull it out, and, presto! you have a beautiful silver comb! By snapping these loops down, thus, a handle is formed, and the loop at the opposite end may be used as a button-hook.

Ah, yes, many ladies wear laced boots now, but I am confidentially informed that buttons are coming in, and in a year all women's shoes will be buttoned. "A stitch in time," you know. One should always

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be prepared. That's the secret of success. Always be prepared. Now, by slipping this spring, the whole string of loops becomes a chain, useful in a variety of ways. It's often found valuable as a supporter for pillow-shams; or, united at the ends, thus, it is worn about a lady's neck as a watch-chain—or a lorgnette may be attached to the end. You've noticed how very fashionable these long chains have become since the introduction of the Patent Adjustable Indestructible Loop Wire Receptacle. Or, by again forming the basket foundation, thus, and attaching the braces, so, one has an egg-basket, always a necessary article in every house.

Never eat eggs? Indeed! Now, that's very interesting! You know, I'm making up a set of statistics about the people who don't eat things, and the things people don't eat. Take your own case, for example. I've discovered in this short time that you eat neither fruit nor eggs. One season I solicited orders for a set of patent cake-tins, and you'd be surprised at the number of ladies who assured me that they never ate cake. It's most interesting.

Yes, to be sure; I know it's Saturday morning, and that's always a busy morning for a housekeeper. I'll not detain you a moment. As I was about to say, by compressing this part and sliding the handle down, you have a most complete and artistic

THE P. A. I. L. W. R.

pudding-dish, of unique and pleasing shape. Oh, pardon me, perhaps you never eat puddings, either? Ah, most interesting! Or, by flattening it, thus, and pulling this end out, you have a complete toaster and broiler, suitable for use with any kind of heat, coal, gas, oil, or electricity. Again, by scooping out the bottom, thus, pushing these wires back, and shaping it a little with the fingers, you have a handsome picture-frame, of the shape known as the shadow-box, without the heavy, sombre appearance of the usual shadow-boxes made in black.

Now, I see by the toys on the front stoop that you have little ones—ah, yes, what is home without the little darlings!—and what could be a more suitable frame for the baby's picture than that? Just fancy the little dear—his father's joy—a little girl? Indeed! I might have known it! I think I saw her outside. She has her mother's smile. As I was about to say, just picture the little dear, his fa—oh, to be sure!—*her* father's joy, looking out of that shining frame! Have you the baby's picture at hand, Mrs. Brastow? Ah, I'm sorry. I should have liked to see it in this frame. It would have been a pleasant memory to carry away with me.

Yes; just a moment, please. Then, by completing the basket form again, and by stretching these loops to the uttermost, you have a waste-basket, light, durable, clean, and exceedingly handsome.

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Or by slightly pressing it together and decreasing its size, one has a jardiniere, suitable for—just a moment, please—a jardiniere, suitable for potted plants.

By studying the various combinations possible to the Patent Adjustable Indestructible Loop Wire Receptacle—and we give with each one (without extra charge) a copy of this valuable little booklet containing full instructions—one may have, as I have said, a fruit-dish, a pin-tray, a beautiful hair-comb, a watch-chain, a sham-supporter, a pudding-dish, an egg-basket, a toaster and broiler, a picture-frame, a waste-basket, or a jardiniere. Not only this—I'll not detain you five minutes more, madam!—but a candlestick—you know how fashionable candles have become since this wonderful little invention has been on the market?—a small easel, a receptacle for a glass holding hot liquid, as whis—ahem!—*lemonade*; a stove-hook, a flatiron stand, a tea-tray—perhaps you don't drink tea? Beg pardon; no offence meant, I assure you! I was merely thinking of my book—the statistics, you know.

Yes, yes, I quite appreciate your position, Mrs. Brastow. I'm a busy man myself, and, of course, the quicker I can make a sale, the better I'm pleased. Now, sometimes I make a sale right away, and sometimes it takes me all the morning. It's against my principles to ask anybody to buy. There's **no**

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greater mistake in this business than urging people to buy. The point is to convince the lady that she wants the article—just stay right with her until she's convinced—and then your work's done. The really successful salesman never has to ask anybody to buy. I'm very successful that way myself.

But some ladies are slow to accept the fact, you know, that there's anything new in the world that's better than the old thing they happen to have. Now, I found a little woman in Davisville last week, who was very hard to convince; but I never give up, you know, never give up! That's the secret of success. Never say die! And I stayed with that woman from ten o'clock in the morning until three in the afternoon. But I made the sale! Now she couldn't keep house without the Patent Adjustable Indestructible Loop Wire Receptacle. However, I was about to call your attention to——

Well, they're being sold now at the remarkably low price of sixty-five cents, just to introduce them, you know. Many ladies are buying them by the dozen and half-dozen, realising that this opportunity will not offer again. When I come around next year, the price will have advanced fifty per cent., and I expect to make twice as many sales, for then every lady will know me and the Patent Adjustable Indestructible Loop Wire Receptacle, and will realise that she'll save her time and mine by buying it

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at once. Not that it isn't a pleasure to show it. I'm as proud of it as if it were my own invention. But as I was about to say——

One? Oh, I think you'll need more than that! With a house of this size, you could hardly get along without more than that. I consider six a very small order for a place as large as this. No, really, Mrs. Brastow, my conscience would ache if I let you do yourself that wrong. Yes, I know, but you'll thank me when I'm gone. No, I couldn't feel right about it. Well, of course, you *might* get along with three, but for your own sake, I hate to leave less than half a dozen with you. Three? Very well. Yes, one ninety-five, please. That's right, thank you. I was about to call your attention to the fact that, in addition to the things I have mentioned——

My dear madam, I'm telling you this solely for your own convenience! My sale's made. Very well; but you'll find in the little booklet the directions for making the bread-tray, handkerchief-case, cigar-holder, inkstand, footstool, and hand-satchel, in addition to the other things I mentioned. Good morning, Mrs. Brastow. I'm very glad to have met you. I'll call again next year.

IN A STREET-CAR

IN A STREET-CAR

A Monologue

(She runs on and pauses, panting, on the car-step.)

Oh, conductor, wait a minute, won't you? There's another lady coming. Well, she's running just as hard as she can. She ain't so light as I am. *(Calls to her friend.)* Hurry up! He won't wait! *(To the conductor.)* Land knows we wait long enough for you, sometimes! You needn't be so mighty uppish about waiting a second for us once in a while! What? Time-table? Huh! Your time-table's a movable feast, I guess! I notice the only time you're on time's when there's nobody waiting for you!

(To her friend.) Oh, here you are! Yes, isn't it an awful pull up that hill? *(Lurches toward a seat.)* Oh, my! *(To a passenger.)* Excuse me! I didn't mean to! That is—I couldn't help it, you know! *(Sits. To her friend.)* Did you see what I did? I sat right square down on that man! I think I smashed something he's got in that parcel!

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Something crushed, anyhow. What do you s'pose it is? Looks some as if it might be a hat, don't it? My, don't he look cross! Well, I couldn't help it! These men ought to learn to start a car without jerking a lady off her feet!

Oh, see here, I'm going to pay this fare! Yes, I am, too! You always try to get in ahead. No, I've got it right here! Where *is* my purse? Why—I believe I've lost it! Yes, sir, I must have lost it running up that hill! Stop the car! Oh, look here, conductor! (*She springs up and pulls a strap, shakes her skirts vigorously, and pulls the same strap several times in rapid succession. To the conductor.*) What? Well, I wanted the car to stop and you wouldn't look! I lost my purse because you made me run up that hill to catch your old car, and I want to get off! Stop the car, I tell you! What? Rang the wrong—? The cash register? Well, I don't care if I did! I want to get off! It serves you right if I did ring up a lot of fares! Perhaps the next time a lady wants to get off your car, you'll look at her, and stop the car yourself! Why don't you stop it? I tell you I've lost— (*To a passenger.*) What? Why, yes, that's it! Where'd you find it? On the floor? Well, I declare! That's all right, conductor. (*Sits. To her friend.*) Well, how do you suppose I ever— (*To the conductor.*) What? Pay for the fare I rung up? Well,

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I guess not! I'll pay two fares and that's all I will pay! I'm not going to pay for rides I never got! Well, if you'd been looking where you'd ought to 'a been I wouldn't have touched your old strap! It'll teach you to pay some attention to your passengers. There's a man on the dummy wants a transfer, I guess. You'd better go and see him, or you'll get into some more trouble. (*To her friend.*) Some of these men are so unaccommodating! You'd think this one was a machine, for any interest he ever takes in anything. The other day I didn't know just where I wanted to get off, and if you'll believe it, he got real uppish because I stopped the car so I could look up the street to see if that was the place! He wanted to know why I didn't look in the directory and find out where I wanted to go. As if anybody could carry a directory around with them all the time! Besides, what's a conductor for, I'd like to know, if he isn't for the accommodation of passengers? (*To the conductor.*) Here, conductor, two. Transfers? N-no, I guess not? (*To her friend.*) We don't want to transfer, do we? Or do you want to go to see about that bonnet to-day? She said it would be ready this afternoon. Oh, conductor, wait a minute! Well, perhaps we'd better go. What do you think? All right. (*To conductor.*) Transfers to—why, he's gone! See? He hasn't the least interest in accommodating passen-

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gers. I think he ought to be reported. Oh, I kind o' hate to do it. He might find out and then it would be unpleasant, and us travelling on this line so much.

Who's that woman in the end of the car, do you know? She looks a little like the pictures of Marian Doubleday, the actress, don't she? Not so pretty, though. But they do say Marian Doubleday wasn't such a tearing beauty until she went on the stage and learned to make up. Oh, conductor, transfers to Powell Street. I know you asked us if we wanted transfers, but you didn't wait to find out whether we did or not. If you treat me to much more of your inattention and impertinence I shall see that you are reported.

Oh, yes, Marian's made a great success now, but she had a pretty hard time getting to the top, I guess. Of course, she had all sorts of things to contend against. I sometimes wonder, when I hear of her driving with Mrs. This and lunching with Mrs. That, what her swell friends would say if they knew that her grandmother kept a boarding-house in Sacramento, and that Marian earned her first money as a clerk in a store. I wonder why that girl's face is getting so red? Maybe she saw us looking at her.

They say young Belshaw is perfectly infatuated with her. My nephew works in a florist's shop near

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the theatre, and he says they send her a big pile of flowers from Belshaw every day. Yes, my sister Maud's boy, Johnnie. Yes, he's pretty wild. Just like his father, you know. His people are all that way. Poor Maud never has a minute's comfort with him, for if he's behaving, she's always sure that it's just the calm before the storm—sort of a weather-breeder, you know—and she just worries and frets all the time. She never loses a chance to tell Johnnie how he ought to behave. She's never had a card in the house, nor any wines, nor liquors, nor anything like that. She wouldn't even let him learn to dance. And yet, that boy drinks and smokes and gambles and heaven knows what else! Now, there's my Willie! There couldn't be a nicer boy than Willie! He hasn't a single bad habit—and he's such a comfort with his clothes! His room's as tidy as a girl's. Poor Maud's always asking Johnnie why he doesn't pattern more after his cousin Willie, and—well, I won't tell you what he says. It's awful! And his mother such a religious woman, too!

But in that florist's shop, he sees a lot of gay society fellows like this young Belshaw, and he thinks it's smart to try to be like them. Yes, he's Dr. Belshaw's son—at least, he's adopted. Why, yes, didn't you know that? No, I never heard anything in particular about Fred Belshaw, but he's running

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around after this Marian Doubleday, and when a man gets to going with actresses, it's safe to suppose he ain't any too strict. My Willie wouldn't think of doing such a thing. But Johnnie does. Oh, my, yes! Well, there's that Dolly Dixon, you know; she's in Marian Doubleday's company. Oh, I don't know where he met her. In the shop, I suppose; and Willie says he saw a great big bunch of violets that Johnnie sent her, and him just a clerk! Willie says she's kind o' pretty, though. He saw her going past the shop one day when he was there visiting Johnnie. Willie goes to see Johnnie real often and tries to influence him, you know. Willie's such a conscientious boy!

Oh, see this woman just getting in! Yes, she got that silk at Allitson's. They had ten pieces of it last year, and it was a dollar-forty a yard, but they didn't get rid of it all, and this year they sold off what they had left for ninety-eight cents. Yes, it's good value. I think it'll fade, though. M-h'm, that trimming looks real nice, don't it? She must have bought it at Meyerfeld's sale. Sixteen cents a yard; but it looks nice, don't it? I don't believe it'll wear, though. Meyerfeld's having a sale of laces this week. Oh, hadn't you heard about it? Oh, my dear, real bargains! I saw some inserting for four cents a yard that's just what you want for the baby's things. Let's go right down

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there and get it; and then we can walk back and use our transfers, just the same. And there was some wide lace—oh, as wide as that!—for twenty-four cents. Oh, I don't know what you'd use it for, but it would come in handy some day. Yes, I bought some, just on a venture. It seems wasteful to let a chance like that go by, you know.

Oh, here goes the girl! If she was only a little better-looking, she'd be the image of Marian Doubleday. It must be annoying to look so much like an actress. Makes a girl so conspicuous! Mercy! Did you see the look she gave me?

Oh, there's Mrs. Beaver! She's speaking to that girl. Now, we'll find out who she is. Oh, how do you do, Mrs. Beaver? Such a long time since I've seen you! And is this little Horace? How do you do, dear? How he grows! Just the living image of his father, too, isn't he? Your other boys are getting to be young men, aren't they? Your Tommie's just three months younger than my Willie. I hope he's as much comfort to you as Willie is to me. Smokes, doesn't he? Oh, don't you mind it! Yes, I know his father always did, and I s'pose you do get used to those things if you have to live with 'em, but my Willie has never wanted to do anything like that. I never have any more trouble with him than's if he was a girl.

Oh, Mrs. Beaver, who was the girl you spoke to

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as you got into the car? Marian Doubleday! That girl in the blue dress Marian Double—well, I said it looked like her, didn't I? But her pictures flatter her. Yes, she's getting to be quite famous, isn't she? But it must be embarrassing to go along the street and know that everybody knows who you are! But then, not everybody knows about her. Oh, I used to know them in Sacramento, you know. At least, my cousin lived next door to her grandmother's boarding-house, and—why, yes! Didn't you know that? And Marian clerked in a store. Sold buttons and thread and that sort of thing, you know. And her grandfather, old Dick Doubleday, was an awful old wretch. He used to— What? Where? Is that Dolly Dixon? My! Look at that hat! And that coat! Who's that fellow talking to her? Why—it's my Willie! Conductor, stop the car! I want to get right off! This is some of Johnnie's work! Willie never met that girl of his own accord! Conductor, why don't you stop this car? But I don't want to go to the end of the block! I want to get off here! Oh, dear! Well, good-bye! Oh, where'll I meet you? At Meyerfeld's? At the lace counter? Oh, I won't be long. Yes, conductor, just a second! Well, at the notion counter, then? Oh, when you're at the lace counter, get me two yards more of that twenty— (*to conductor*) yes, of course I'm going to get off!

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—twenty-four-cent lace. Oh, it's about so wide, and cream colour. You can't miss it. Yes, just as soon as I've sent that girl about her business! (*To conductor.*) Oh, wait! I'm going to get off! Well, I told you I was! I never saw anybody so impatient! I'll report you before night! Good-bye!

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Oh, how do you do, Mrs. Disbrow? Are you going so early? . . . Yes, we've just come. This is my niece, Miss Chester. We've been to the Gorham reception. Such a tiresome crush! But of course, everybody was there, and one had to show one's self, at least. How are the gowns this year? Anything worth seeing? (A private view is such an excellent place to see new gowns as a rule, but last year I thought they were very tame. Mrs. Belknap wore one that was really quite frumpy, if you remember. Good night. Oh, by the way, how are the pictures? Which one is attracting the most comment? Bosqui? Ah, I never heard of him. Oh, indeed? I must look at it. Which wall is it on? Thank you; I'll glance at it. Good night.

There's Mrs. Forsyth, Muriel, that woman in grey. She must have brought that gown from Vienna. She's just home. And there's Mrs. Belknap in a gown she's worn all winter. Such shocking taste in a woman of her position! It's really one's duty to dress as well as one's income permits.

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Last year she paid two thousand dollars for one picture, and came to the private view in a shocking gown. I wonder who she's talking to? Frowsy-looking man. Some impossible genius, I dare say. She cultivates 'em.

Oh, here's Kauffman, the great portrait painter—this large, shaggy man at the left. Let's go a little nearer. He's talking about Bosqui, too. Did you hear that? "The success of the year" . . . "keen sense of colour values" . . . "remarkable distance" . . . "feeling for line" . . . "atmosphere" . . . what was that about atmosphere? I didn't quite catch it. Evidently, Muriel, this Bosqui is promising. We must have him in to tea some day. Perhaps I'll have him do a little thing for me.

Oh, how do you do, Mrs. Dwinelle? Mr. Dwinelle, you've met my niece? Yes, we've just come from the Gorham reception. Such a tiresome crush! We got away as quickly as we could; but you know, when one's friends entertain, one must really show one's self, at least. Oh, *everybody* was there. Have you seen Bosqui's picture? Such feeling for line and distance! My dear, I predict that he'll have a *Career!* Wonderful atmosphere! Really, wonderful! Ah? I've been here so short a time, I'm by no means sure I've discovered all his work; but one glance is sufficient! Er—how many

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pictures has he? Only one? Ah, really! Such a pity there aren't more! It's quite the only thing on the walls worth talking about, I assure you. I'm thinking of having him do a little thing for me. Yes? Good night, then.

Muriel, did you hear Kauffman say anything about Bosqui's *chiaroscuro*? Are you positive? Well, he must have *chiaroscuro*, if he has all those other things, don't you think?

Oh, how do you do, Mr. Atherton? Muriel, my dear, here's Mr. Atherton. Yes, we've just come from the Gorham reception. Such a tiresome crush! But of course, one must go! Everybody does! You're going there from here? Yes, of course, one does see the pictures better before the crowd comes. Tell me, *have* you seen Bosqui's thing? Oh, my dear Mr. Atherton, you mustn't go until you've seen it! I have seldom been so struck by a line—I mean, by—by—the distance! Such remarkable feeling for colour, you know! And *chiaroscuro*! *Such* *chiaroscuro*! Really, he'll have a Career! You mark my word, he'll be the success of the season. How do you do, Mrs. Belknap? Mr. Atherton, who *is* that frowsy-looking person with Mrs. Belknap? Is he—er—*anybody*, you know? She's been talking to him ever since we arrived, and—one never knows about Mrs. Belknap's friends. Sometimes, they're quite—er—well, the sort of per-

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son one would like to assist, you know, by asking them to tea, or something. And then sometimes—really, she knows such extraordinary persons, sometimes! Ah, then I dare say he's nobody. Yes, it is getting late. Good night. We shall see you Friday? Good night.

Muriel, there's not a gown here that I'd be seen in except that grey frock of Mrs. Forsyth's. Where? Oh, yes, very nice, I dare say. I don't care much for marine things, you know. (Oh, here comes Mrs. Bennett. Art patron, and all that sort of thing, you know.

How do you do, Mrs. Bennett? Isn't everything charming! Such a relief to see some pictures again! One gets so tired of merely social affairs! We've just come from the Gorham reception. Such a frightful crush! But of course, we know them so well, and—*everybody* was there. Really, everybody, you know! Yes, the pictures are very good—really very good this year. But of course, there's nothing to compare with Bosqui's thing. Isn't it wonderful? Such remarkable feeling for line, you know—and the distance! My dear, did you ever see such distance! He has such a rare sense of colour values, too! Oh, I predict a brilliant future for him! I'm going to have him do a little thing for me—just a little thing, you know. You know him, of course? Do bring him in to tea with us

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some day while my niece is here. Fridays, you know. Yes; good-bye.

Dear me, what an ordinary looking lot of gowns! Eh? Oh, yes, I dare say. I don't care for figures, you know. What's the title? "The Tempest?" "*The Tempest!*" How excessively stupid! They've made a mistake in the catalogues! Really, such carelessness is inconceivable! I shall have this reported to the Secretary. "The Tempest," indeed! Just a stupid-looking girl, and an old man, and a—er—a—er—what *is* that creature? Eh? Thank you, madam; I *quite* understood that it was after Shakespeare. How excessively impertinent! That young woman—who has never been presented to me, I'm quite sure—presumed to inform me that this picture is—er—of course, any one could see at a glance! Well, my dear, the title is misleading. It is very stupidly named. The picture should have been called "Caliban." To entitle it "The Tempest" is—er—is *plagiarism!* I'm surprised that the Committee permitted it to be hung. It's by that man Sorbier. They tell shocking things about him. His own father, who was a very respectable sort of person, I believe, cut him off without a sou, my dear, without a sou! But Mrs. Belknap receives him. She says he has temperament. I dare say he has. I've noticed that the friends of men who have temperament are always apologising

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for it. There's Mrs. Belknap now, still with that frowsy man. He looks as if he might have temperament, too. Eh? Oh, yes, yes, child, I suppose so, if you care for that sort of thing. Landscape doesn't interest me, you know. I wonder where the Bosqui thing is? Do you see it anywhere? How very thick the crowd's getting! Do let's go and find some punch! What? Where? Oh, that? M-m-m, no, I can't say that I care for it. Still life never appeals to me, you know.

Oh, Miss Wendell, isn't this a crush? It's not quite as stifling as the Gorham reception, though. We've just come from there. Such a frightful crush! Really, I wonder why we do it; but everybody was there, you know—and one really must be civil when one's friends——

Eh? What is it, Muriel? Oh, my dear child, a mere smudge! Do try to cultivate some feeling for Art, Muriel! No, no, it's perfectly impossible! What *was* the man thinking of? Ah, well, never mind. It's nothing of consequence. Real Art idealises, my dear. This is hopelessly realistic. That sky is simply the colour that any ordinary person might see. Indeed, the colour is quite ordinary throughout. You see? A complete lack of artistic feeling and perception. Do let us find the Bosq——

Oh, Dr. Houghton! You came away early from

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the Gorhams', too. *Have* you seen the Bosqui? Eh? What is it, Muriel? *That* the Bosqui! *That*? Oh—er—yes, my niece and I were quite lost in admiration of it as you came up. Such a wonderful sense of colour values! And—er—er—such a relief to see a bit of *real* Art, after the flood of impressionistic stuff! I'm going to have him do a little thing for me. Eh? Bosqui himself? Really? Do let me see him! Where—where *is* my lorgnette! That? You mean the—the *distinct*-looking man with Mrs. Belknap? Is that Bosqui? Ah, one can see at a glance that he has temperament! Do, please, present him! Mrs. Belknap has monopolised him quite long enough.

Muriel, that—that very *interesting* looking man who has been with Mrs. Belknap all the evening is Bosqui, and Dr. Houghton is going to——

Ah, Mr. Bosqui, so *charmed* to meet you! My niece and I have been quite lost here before your picture! Such a wonderful sense of colour values! I'm sure you must *hear* colour, as I do! Doesn't beautiful colour always seem to you like a chord of exquisite music? And the distance! Really, I never saw such distance on canvas, never! And the tempera—er—I mean, the *atmosphere*! One can fairly breathe it! Now, that little touch there at the left— Ah, no, unfortunately, I have never studied painting—that is, really *studied* it, you

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know; but I think if one has sincere feeling for ART—er—don't you? Ah, yes, of course, my niece; this is my niece, Miss Chester. Dr. Houghton, will you bring Mr. Bosqui in to tea on Friday? There are so many things I want to ask him about his work, you know. Mr. Bosqui. Er—Mr. *Bosqui!* Dr. Houghton has promised to bring you to us for tea on Friday. Oh, certainly, my niece will be there. Ah, that will be delightful! I want to talk to you about doing a little thing for me. You know, I predict a great future for you. Come, Muriel. So charmed to have met you, Mr. Bosqui! On Friday, then. Good night.

THE END.

By Gelett Burgess and Will Irwin

Authors of "The Picaroons"

THE REIGN OF QUEEN ISYL



IN "The Reign of Queen Isyl" the authors have hit upon a new scheme in fiction. The book is both a novel and a collection of short stories. The main story deals with a carnival of flowers in a California city. Just before the coronation the Queen of the Fiesta disappears, and her Maid of Honor is crowned in her stead—Queen Isyl. There are plots and counterplots—half-mockery, half-earnest—beneath which the reader is tantalized by glimpses of the genuine mystery surrounding the real queen's disappearance.

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How

By Stanley J. Weyman

Author of "A Gentleman of France"

THE LONG NIGHT

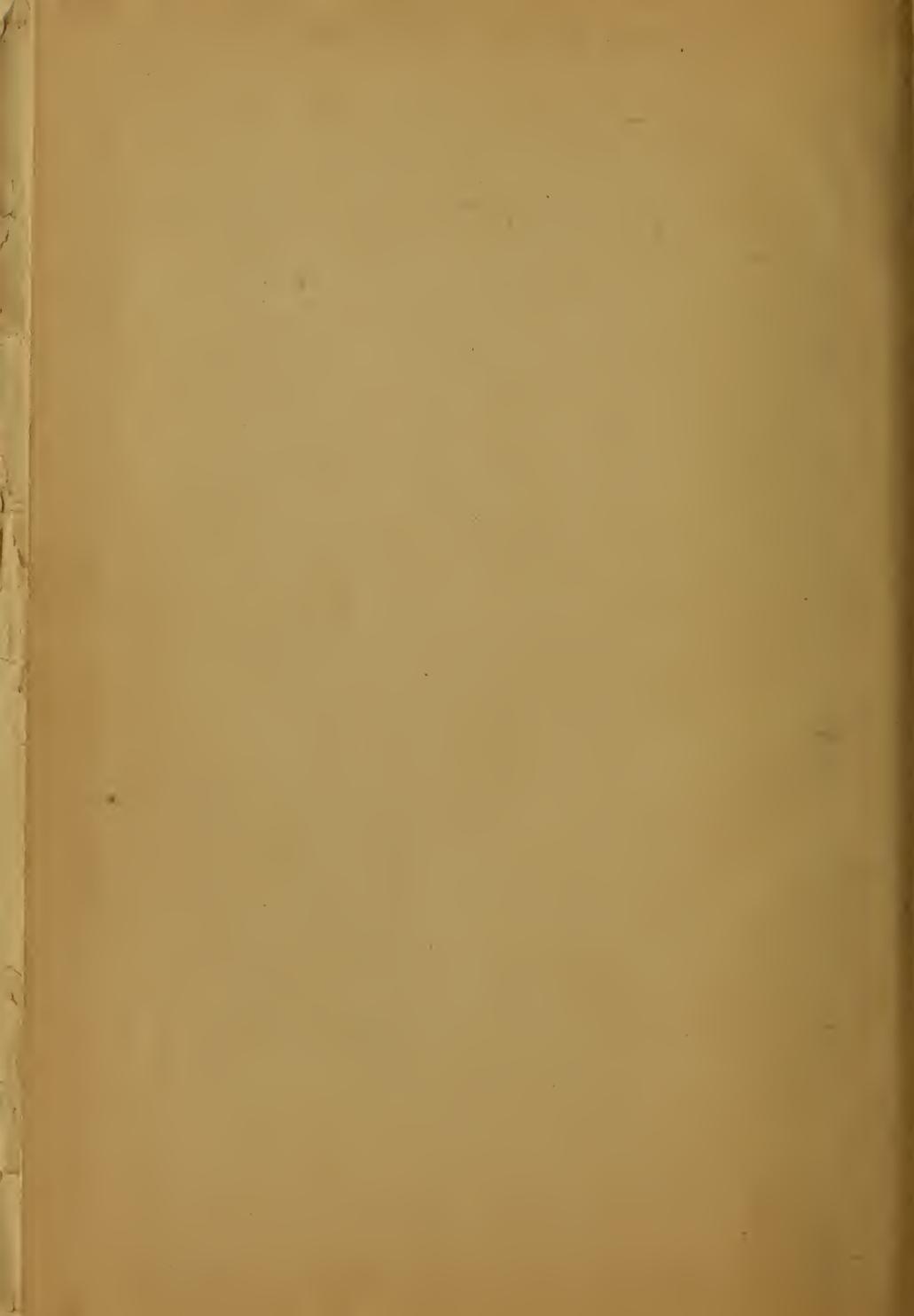


GENEVA in the early days of the 17th century; a ruffling young theologue new to the city; a beautiful and innocent girl, suspected of witchcraft; a crafty scholar and metaphysician seeking to give over the city into the hands of the Savoyards; a stern and powerful syndic whom the scholar beguiles to betray his office by promises of an elixir which shall save him from his fatal illness; a brutal soldier of fortune; these are the elements of which Weyman has composed the most brilliant and thrilling of his romances. Claude Mercier, the student, seeing the plot in which the girl he loves is involved, yet helpless to divulge it, finds at last his opportunity when the treacherous men of Savoy are admitted within Geneva's walls, and in a night of whirlwind fighting saves the city by his courage and address. For fire and spirit there are few chapters in modern literature such as those which picture the splendid defence of Geneva, by the staid, churchly, heroic burghers, fighting in their own blood under the divided leadership of the fat Syndic, Baudichon, and the bandy-legged sailor, Jehan Brosse, winning the battle against the armed and armored forces of the invaders.

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